

## DAT PREPARATION RECOMMENDATIONS

The tips on this handout come from past advisees who have earned very high scores on the DAT over the past several years, with many direct quotations from the students themselves. Each time a student earns a high score, I ask him or her to review this handout to add new comments or edits, so it is constantly under revision.

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## PART I. GENERAL DAT PREP TIPS

- “A flexible schedule is vital. You need a schedule to keep you on track, but it needs to be flexible, because life happens and creating unrealistic rigidity can cause stress to the point of inaction when your schedule gets off track. I set ‘suggested’ daily goals for myself, but these were flexible for when I had other things come up, or if a chapter was very difficult and took me longer than expected to get through. I also set ‘rigid’ weekly goals to keep myself on track, and was diligent about always meeting these. This system personally worked very well for me.”
- It is very important to complete sets of practice problems and full-length practice tests. It is *equally* important to review these problems after you are done:
  - “After each set of practice problems and each full-length practice test, go through every single question carefully. In addition to understanding why the right answers are right, be sure you fully understand why *every single wrong-answer choice is wrong*. If you encounter a concept that is new to you, even if only it only showed up in the context of an answer choice that was incorrect, be sure to teach yourself about that concept. In fact, a couple of the concepts that showed up on my real DAT were ones that I had only encountered in the context of wrong-answer choices on practice problems and practice exams.”
  - “The DAT is nicer than the MCAT in that there aren't many trick answer choices; if you know the material, the answer pops out. But if anything is blurry or not completely comprehended in your mind, you will have trouble with it on the test. So, when working on practice problems and practice tests, make sure you understand why an answer choice is correct or incorrect. Don't just gloss over it; you must *learn* it.”
- An important topic: scratch paper and pens! Throughout your DAT prep, be disciplined about using the same type of scratch paper and pens that you will have to use at the testing center: “Go to a copy center and pay to have several pieces of graph paper laminated. Always use these laminated pages as your scratch paper as you work on practice problems and take your practice tests. This is what they'll give you at the real DAT, and it's a little more awkward to use than pencil-and-paper, so it's helpful to get used to using it. Be sure to practice with fine-tip Sharpies, as this is what you will be given on test day.” (You can erase the Sharpie ink from your laminated graph paper using acetone-based nail-polish remover.)
  - Be aware: On test day, if you leave a marker uncapped for too long without writing, it will dry and take a while to get it going again. ... “I heard of this happening while researching ahead of my DAT so I asked for—and was granted—two things when I checked in:
    - I asked for two markers
    - I asked to test each marker to ensure they weren't dry.”
- “I used the following daily checklist while I was in my DAT Prep period:  
[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1AlaLBRTa591-bx\\_3rDcjgi8gLt4xq\\_4FIAZW-qqDw3s/edit?ts=5e558dc7](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1AlaLBRTa591-bx_3rDcjgi8gLt4xq_4FIAZW-qqDw3s/edit?ts=5e558dc7)  
I laminated it and used a dry erase marker to check it off every day.”

## PART II. PRACTICE TEST TIPS

- Make sure that you take as many full-length practice tests (under realistic test-like conditions) as you need to get to the point that you are consistently scoring above your target score on each section. (Most people need to take 7 or 8 full-length tests before they feel ready.) Here is what I mean by mimicking “test-like conditions”:
  - Sit at a desk, in a firm chair, in a public place like a library (where there will be distractions coming from other people)
  - Follow the exact timing of test day, starting each practice test at the same time of day when you will take your exam, adhering strictly to the time limits for each section and for each break period, completing each section in the proper order, and only eating and using the restroom at designated break times.
  - Be sure to do at least some of your practice tests in an electronic format (not just paper-and-pencil), to mimic the real experience of a computer-based test.
  - At the real test, it will be completely impractical to get up to go to the bathroom in the middle of a section (you’ll have to sign in and out, get fingerprinted, and be swiped with a metal detector, which takes way too much time), so only go to the bathroom during the allotted break period during your practice tests.
  - Likewise, you will not be allowed to have a water bottle on your desk at the real test – drink water only during the break period.
  - Be aware that, contrary to the suggestions in some of the test prep materials, you will NOT be allowed to write anything during the Intro section.
  - You will not be allowed to take off layers of clothes or your shoes during the real test, so dress accordingly: “I had heard about this, so I dressed to be ready for hot or cold conditions! I wore sweats with athletic shorts underneath & a light hoodie with a t-shirt underneath. If it was hot or cold when I arrived at the testing center, I could add or remove layers prior to beginning the exam.”
    - ... If you mimic these conditions during your practice tests, you will help yourself feel more comfortable on your real test day, which can help maximize your performance.
- “After a practice exam, take the day off. Do not study, do not review. Give yourself a break. The day after that, do a solid review of the exam, which will take longer than you spent on the practice test.”

## PART III. RECOMMENDED COMBINATIONS OF RESOURCES

You will NOT need all of the resources mentioned on the following pages. Rather, here are three combinations that have worked well for many people:

*Combo #1* (for people who like written review of the sciences in an online format):

- a) DAT Bootcamp
- b) You may want to add some *Crack the DAT* practice problems for the PAT section
- c) Additional practice tests

*Combo #2* (for people who like video review of the sciences):

- a) Chad's Videos (You may need to supplement with additional Biology review materials, as the Bio section is still under construction. Suggested additional Bio materials are mentioned below.)
- b) QVault practice problems
- c) *Crack the DAT* and/or *DAT Bootcamp* practice problems for the PAT section
- d) Practice tests.

*Combo #3* (for people who like book-based review of the sciences)

- a) The DAT Destroyer book (and Math Destroyer, if you think that would also help you)
- b) Q Vault practice problems
- c) *Crack the DAT* and/or *DAT Bootcamp* practice problems for the PAT section
- d) Practice tests

## PART III. DETAILS ABOUT RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- 1) **DAT Bootcamp:** *Highly recommended online resource for both subject review and practice tests*
  - “My favorite resource for reviewing all of the sections and for taking practice tests. The author personally – and quickly! – responds to inquiries. Inexpensive, and all sections were great.”
  - “This was the cheapest but probably the best resource I used.”
  - “Inexpensive and by far my favorite resource and most similar to the actual DAT. There are 10 full-length practice exams. Natural science & QR sections were slightly more challenging than actual DAT. RC was more difficult than actual DAT. PAT was similar in difficulty with some more difficult/easier variance by subsection. At only a few hundred dollars, I think it is by far the best value as long as you’re diligent in your studying and hold yourself accountable, as it is self-paced.”
  - “This was the greatest resource for practice tests because the questions were very similar to the questions of the DAT. Ari, the owner of the website, is very knowledgeable and responsive to any questions about the DAT. The quantitative reasoning and PAT questions are harder than the ones on the real DAT, but this resource had the best explanations for each question. I would highly recommend this source for the PAT section alone. If you can get decent scores on the PAT section in Bootcamp, you will be ready to kill the DAT. Besides other practice tests, this was the sole resource I used for Reading Comprehension.”
  - “Start by reading through Ari’s Study Guide and then use Ari’s study schedule (which is free on DAT Bootcamp).”
  - “The Bootcamp Facebook group had nice questions and everybody was very nice and supportive of each other and asked questions that helped prepare me for exam day.”
  
- 2) **Chad’s Videos (coursesaver.com):** *Super-helpful videos for reviewing subject matter*
  - Monthly subscription fee
  - Quantitative Reasoning videos are DAT-specific
  - O Chem materials are considered to be very similar to that on real DAT
  - Bio resources are currently in development (you may still need to supplement with some of the other Bio resources listed below)
  - Tip: Use note outlines while going through videos
  - “This was the single best resource I used. As long as you understand Organic Chemistry 1, Chad will teach you every reaction that you will need to know for the DAT. His general chemistry videos were also great because he will go over all the concepts and equations while simultaneously narrowing down the material that you would need to know. I recommend watching all his biology, chemistry, organic chemistry, and quantitative reasoning videos before moving on to other resources. His chemistry and organic chemistry videos/quizzes would be sufficient for the DAT, but other resources will definitely be needed for quantitative reasoning and biology.”

### 3) Preparing for the Perceptual Abilities Test:

Choose one or both of the following resources. Be aware that past advisees consistently report that the PAT prep materials in all other resources were not sufficient for preparing for this section of the test:

- **Crack the DAT:** Many students have found this resource to be particularly helpful for preparing for the PAT section (but it is *not* recommended for preparing for the other sections on the test).
  - Pricing starts at \$100.
  - “The PAT questions in Crack the DAT are most similar to the real DAT in terms of difficulty. I would recommend doing this program first to learn about the PAT section and then move to more difficult problems in the PAT section of DAT Bootcamp.”
  - “Everything in the PAT section of Crack the DAT was spot-on or harder than the real test, with the exception of the following two types of questions:
    - In Crack the DAT, the alternatives on the apertures were easily eliminated, whereas on the actual test the answer choices were pretty similar from a single view and you had to judge distances to figure it out.”
    - TFE in Crack the DAT was easier than the real test because you could get away with line counting.”
- **DAT Bootcamp**
  - “I thought it was helpful to practice for the PAT using Bootcamp because their practice problems were actually more difficult than the PAT problems on the actual DAT. (The only section that, in retrospect, was easier than on the actual DAT was the hole-punching section.) The more practice problems I did, the easier they got.”
  - “For the PAT, if you can master the generators on Bootcamp, you’ll be fine. Find an obvious feature and then eliminate any choices that don’t have that feature correct. That normally gets you down to two choices, so then you can compare them to the given views and one will obviously be right and the other wrong. Angle-ranking and keyhole were the hardest IMO. The graphics on the actual DAT are much blurrier than in Bootcamp, which made it difficult for me to distinguish the angles apart from one another and gave me trouble on the actual test.”

### 4) DAT Destroyer and Math Destroyer: *Useful preparation books*

- “The Math Destroyer, combined with Chad’s Math Videos, were a perfect combination for preparing for the math section of the DAT.”
- “From my experience, Math Destroyer was a bit overkill in terms of difficulty but it is good because it challenges you forces you to reinforce difficult concepts.”
- “This was great for practice problems and should be used once you understand the concepts of general chemistry, organic chemistry, biology, and quantitative reasoning. The quantitative reasoning in the DAT Destroyer is the most similar to the real DAT that I experienced, but the Math Destroyer was much harder than the real DAT. The questions in the Math Destroyer will kill your confidence, but it had 15 tests that were each 40 questions so it was very helpful in practicing your timing. (The real DAT quantitative reasoning is also 40 questions). The biology in the DAT Destroyer has many small facts that will help you piece information together, but the questions were not very close to the style of questions on the DAT. The general chemistry and organic chemistry questions were harder than the real DAT, but if you understand all these questions you will be well prepared for the real DAT.”
- “Very hard, but a necessary evil. You might only get ½ the questions right the first time through.”
- “Do all 500+ questions in DAT Destroyer, marking your missed questions then go back through a second time. Make sure you read the answer explanations thoroughly and why the wrong answers are wrong.”
- “The Destroyer Facebook group had good questions every day that were nice to see while scrolling through my news feed.”

5) **DAT Qvault** (online, subscription-based service):

- “This is a huge bank of practice problems that provides an excellent study tool for the sciences. I felt their timed sections (10 tests per science section) were very similar to the actual test.”
- “I found this resource to be most useful for preparing for the biology and math sections on the DAT.”

6) **Other resources for preparing for the Biology section (if the materials you are using do not include a complete Bio review):**

- **DAT Bootcamp:** “I spent the majority of my biology studying reviewing the 500+ pages of detailed biology notes available through DAT Bootcamp subscription. They are extremely beneficial and introduce you to everything you’ll need to know for the DAT. If you can get through all of it and comprehend most if it, you’ll be set for the DAT.”
- **Cliff’s AP Biology**
  - “I recommend reading Cliffs AP Biology and taking all the practice tests before moving on to other resources for biology. This was fantastic resource for just starting to study for the biology section. The book is not a difficult read and the practice tests after each chapter were pretty similar to the DAT. I felt the biology section was the hardest section to study for because it is so broad. Giving yourself as much exposure to material as possible is the best strategy for this section.”
  - I started with Cliffs AP Bio book. It’s a good book to refresh yourself with the concepts, but DO NOT use this as your only resource.”
- **Barron’s AP Biology**
  - “Also a great resource and an easy read. When combined with Cliff’s AP Bio, you should cover all the major topics for the exam.”
- **Alan’s Notes** (available online, free)
  - “These are the notes from Cliff’s AP Biology. Each day, I would read over a new chapter and when I found new material (from practice tests, books, etc.), I would add them to these Word documents. In doing so, after a few weeks they were closer to being my own notes, but they were beneficial in providing a great backbone to start from.”
- **Ferali’s Biology Notes** (available online, free)
  - “Ferali’s notes are very detailed. If you ever find material that you haven’t seen before, it most likely can be found in this document. I used this resource to look up unfamiliar topics, rather than using Google or Wikipedia. I used these documents the most for studying biology.”
  - From another student: “I believe that DAT Bootcamp worked with Ferali’s Biology to expand upon the basic Ferali’s Biology notes, creating even more detailed (and DAT-specific) biology notes that were incredibly helpful.”
- **Campbell Biology PowerPoints**
  - The test makers draw their test questions from Campbell's Biology book (the textbook used for General Biology 1 and 2 at CU Boulder)
  - PowerPoints for every chapter in the book can be found for free at:  
[http://www.course-notes.org/biology/slides/campbells\\_biology\\_8th\\_edition](http://www.course-notes.org/biology/slides/campbells_biology_8th_edition)
    - “These Powerpoints cover all of the topics on the biology section of the test, as well as topics/details that were otherwise completely absent in other review books. One of the things that I took away from my own experience was that the bio section can be a little random, so you need to expose yourself to as much as material as possible (the motto "breadth before depth" is a good one to follow). Although maybe a little overkill and not completely necessary, the Campbell Biology PowerPoints are an invaluable resource for those who are looking to cover all their bases and get those extra few questions (I saw at least two on my exam).”

## 7) Practice Tests:

- **ADA (American Dental Association) full-length practice tests:** Available for purchase on their website for about \$100. You can also purchase additional stand-alone practice sections for \$20 each.
  - “The ADA practice tests are, of course, going to be representative of the real DAT. My real scores were very similar to what I got on the last ADA practice test I took a week before my exam. If you take this test online you would not be able to see what questions you missed, so I would recommend ordering the mail copy.”
- **DAT Boot Camp**
  - “I did not purchase any additional practice tests outside of the DAT Bootcamp subscription.”
- **Top Score Pro** offers three full practice tests that are considered to be very similar to the real thing, for a total of about \$60.
- **DAT Achiever** (can purchase up to 7 electronic tests)
  - “I found the two practice tests harder than the real thing in every regard. That can be a good or bad thing depending on who you are.”
  - “Definitely more difficult than the actual exam – do not read into your scores too much. Use it as a learning tool, rather than as an accurate reflection of the test.”
- **Kaplan’s free practice test**
  - “Kaplan holds a free practice test online every month. You can take this test on your own computer and it is probably the best practice test in simulating the environment on the real DAT. They use the same questions each month (I tried taking it twice and realized this), but it is effective in simulating what the DAT program looks like. They also cut down each section in this practice test so you are not completely drained by the end of the test.”

## Not Particularly Recommended:

- **Kaplan Blue Book**
  - “A nice review book for brushing up on topics that you haven't seen in a while, but lacks the detail of other materials. Simply put, you'll probably need supplemental material to be prepared for everything.
- **Cracking the DAT** book, published by The Princeton Review
  - “Not laid out well.”
- **Barron’s DAT book**
  - One advisee who got a great score said she liked this resource because the practice tests explain why the incorrect answers *aren’t* right. But ...
  - Another advisee said, “I don’t recommend this resource. The book was riddled with errors in the answer keys and test questions.”