

Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)

The MCAT is a computer-based standardized examination for prospective medical students. It is designed to assess problem solving, critical thinking, written analysis, and writing skills in addition to knowledge of scientific concepts and principles.

The exam is offered 22 times per year on 19 different testing dates at Thomson Prometric centers. Ever since the exam's duration was shortened to 4.5-5 hours, the test may be offered either in the morning or in the afternoon. Some test dates have both morning and afternoon administrations.

The test consists of four sections, listed in the order in which they are administered on the day of the exam:

- Physical Sciences (PS)
- Verbal Reasoning (VR)
- Writing Sample (WS)
- Biological Sciences (BS)

The Verbal Reasoning, Physical Sciences, and Biological Sciences sections are in multiple-choice format. The Writing sample consists of two short essays that are typed into the computer. The passages and questions are predetermined, and thus do not change in difficulty depending on the performance of the test taker (unlike, for example, the GRE).

The science sections (PS and BS) test analytical and logical cognitive abilities. The Verbal Reasoning section was implemented to test understanding of various subtleties involved in human communication and understanding.

Administration

Section	Questions	Minutes
Physical Sciences	52	70
Verbal Reasoning	40	60
Writing Sample	2	60
Biological Sciences	52	70

The Physical Sciences section is administered first. It is composed of 52 multiple-choice questions related to general chemistry and physics. Exam takers are allotted 70 minutes to complete this section of the exam.

The Verbal Reasoning section follows the Physical Sciences section and an optional 10 minute break. Exam takers have 60 minutes to answer 40 multiple-choice questions evaluating their comprehension, evaluation, and application of information gathered from written passages. Unlike the Physical and Biological Sciences sections, the Verbal Reasoning section is not supposed to require specific content knowledge in order to perform well.

With the new Computer-Based Testing format the 60 minute lunch break has been substituted by an optional 10 minute break. The Writing Sample gives examinees 60 minutes to compose responses to two prompts (30 minutes for each prompt, separately timed). Each essay is graded on a scale of 1 to 6 points twice. The scores from individual essays are added together and then converted to a letter scale of J, the lowest, through T, the highest.

After the Writing Samples, there is an optional 10 minute break followed by the Biological Sciences section. Examinees have 70 minutes to answer 52 multiple-choice questions related to organic chemistry and biology.

Scoring

Scores for the three multiple-choice sections range from 1 to 15. Scores for the writing section range alphabetically from J (lowest) to T (highest). The writing section is graded by three different readers. The first reader is Intellimetric, a proprietary computer program developed by Vantage Learning, which analyzes creative writing and syntax. The second and third readers are humans, who generally look at the overall impact rather than spelling and grammar.

The numerical scores from each section are added together to give a composite score. The score from the writing sample may also be appended to the composite score (e.g. 35S). The maximum composite score is 45T but any score over 30P is considered fairly competitive, as this is the average for matriculants to medical school. There is no penalty for incorrect multiple choice answers, thus even random guessing is preferable to leaving an answer choice blank (unlike many other standardized tests).

Policies

The MCAT may be voided on the day of the exam if the exam taker is not satisfied with his or her performance. The decision to void must be made before leaving the test center and before seeing the exam results.

The AAMC prohibits the use of calculators, timers, or other electronic devices during the exam. Cellular phones are also strictly prohibited from testing rooms and individuals found to possess them are noted by name in a security report submitted to the AAMC. The only item you may bring into the testing room with you is your photo ID. If you wear a jacket or sweater, it may not be removed in the testing room.

The limit with the computerized MCAT is three times per year, with no lifetime limit. An examinee can register for only one test date at a time, and must wait two days before registering for a new test date.

MCAT exam results are made available to examinees approximately thirty days after the test via the AAMC's MCAT Testing History (THx) Web application. Examinees do not receive a copy of their scores in the mail. MCAT THx is also used to transmit scores to medical schools, application services and other organizations (at no cost).

Preparation

Like most standardized tests, there are a variety of preparatory materials available. The AAMC itself offers both paper and computerized practice tests (composed of administered test questions and diagnostics) available for purchase at its website. Many test preparation companies offer classroom based courses. Approximately half of the students taking the MCAT use a test prep company. Various books are available from test preparation companies to prepare for the test.