

## A Guide to Preparing for the MCAT

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### **The Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) – What is it?**

The MCAT is a standardized test used in the admissions process for medical schools (Aspiring Docs, n.d.). It is a 7 ½ hour computer-based multiple-choice test that evaluates your knowledge and skills in areas that are deemed essential for success in medical school (Aspiring Docs, n.d.). The MCAT is divided into 4 sections that test your abilities in these different areas, in the order of: chemistry and physics, critical analysis and reasoning, biology and biochemistry, and psychology and sociology. The MCAT score is totaled from each section, with a score range of 472 – 528 with a median score of 500, and each section is scored between 118 – 132. The MCAT can be taken 3 times per year and 4 times in 2 years with test dates administered between January and September and can be taken a total of 7 times in a lifetime. A list of MCAT test dates and accompanying score release dates in Canada for 2021 can be found [here](#).

### **Section 1: Chemical and Physical Foundations of Biological Systems**

The first section of the MCAT is 95 minutes long and consists of 59 multiple choice questions (AAMC, n.d.). This section applies your scientific inquiry and reasoning skills to solving problems related to chemistry and physics concepts (AAMC, n.d.). To prepare, it is recommended that you have an understanding of introductory level biology, organic chemistry, general chemistry, and physics (AAMC, n.d.)

### **Section 2: Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills (CARS)**

The second section of the MCAT is 90 minutes long and consists of 53 multiple choice questions (AAMC, n.d.). The CARS section is entirely passage-based, consisting of 9 passages of varying difficulty. The content of the passages is based on a variety of topics, mostly consisting of humanities and social sciences (AAMC, n.d.). Generally, the CARS tests your abilities in comprehension and reasoning within and beyond the text (AAMC, n.d.).

### **Section 3: Biological and Biochemical Foundations of Living Systems**

The third section of the MCAT is 95 minutes long and consists of 59 multiple choice questions (AAMC, n.d.). This section applies your scientific inquiry and reasoning skills to solving problems related to biology and biochemistry concepts (AAMC, n.d.). To prepare, it is recommended that you have an understanding of biochemistry, biology, organic chemistry, and general chemistry (AAMC, n.d.).

### **Section 4: Psychological, Social, and Biological Foundations of Behavior**

The fourth section of the MCAT is 95 minutes long and consists of 59 multiple choice questions (AAMC, n.d.). This section applies your scientific inquiry and reasoning skills to solving

problems related to psychology, sociology, and biology concepts. To prepare, it is recommended that you have an understanding of introductory psychology, introductory sociology, and biology.

### **SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) and the 2021 MCAT**

In 2020, changes were made to the administration of the MCAT to accommodate for the rapidly evolving coronavirus pandemic. Most of these adjustments pertained to the 2020 testing year and have not been carried over into the 2021 testing year, with the exception of the shortened score reporting times of 2 weeks after the MCAT instead of 4 weeks.

### **MCAT Test Schedule (Sample)**

Personally, my recommendation is to create a weekly schedule every week about 3-4 months leading up to your test date. In this, you should plan to do bi-weekly practice tests and increase this to weekly practice tests in the month before your test, with a day after to go over your practice test results. You should also plan for a day off in each week to avoid burnout, or study fatigue. However, there is no “correct” way to prepare for the MCAT, so certainly try different strategies and see what works for you.

### Sample MCAT Study Schedule

MCAT Study Week 1: May 16 – May 22, 2021

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Schedule							
Subjects of Study							
Resources							

In schedule, plan out what you will do throughout the day (ex. 9-12 study, 12-1 lunch, etc.). In subjects of study, plan what you will be focusing on while studying that day (ex. organic chemistry, general chemistry, biology, etc.). In resources, plan what resources you will use to study that day (ex. MCAT biology textbook CH.1-3, Khan Academy Video, MCAT biology lecture 3, etc.).

### Who Requires the MCAT in Canada?

The following table categorizes all Canadian medical schools into 3 categories: (1) schools that require the MCAT, (2) schools that require the CARS only, and (3) schools that do not require the MCAT.

**Table 1.** Medical school MCAT requirements for Ontario applicants.

Requires the MCAT	Requires <u>only</u> the CARS section	Does not require the MCAT (for students who obtained a degree from a Canadian University)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dalhousie University</li> <li>• Queens University</li> <li>• University of Alberta</li> <li>• University of British Columbia</li> <li>• University of Manitoba</li> <li>• University of Saskatchewan</li> <li>• University of Toronto</li> <li>• Western University</li> <li>• Université de Sherbrooke</li> <li>• Memorial University*</li> <li>• Université Laval Faculté de Médecine *</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• McMaster University</li> <li>• University of Calgary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• McGill University</li> <li>• University of Ottawa</li> <li>• Lakehead University</li> <li>• Université de Montréal *</li> </ul>

\* = Francophone only schools

### Additional Resources

[AAMC - Anatomy of an Applicant](#)

[AAMC – What’s on the MCAT exam?](#)

[AAMC - What you need to know about the MCAT exam](#)

### Contact Information

For questions related to the MCAT or medical school admissions, feel free to reach out to me at [jaredtreverton@trentu.ca](mailto:jaredtreverton@trentu.ca)

## References

AAMC. (n.d.). *What's on the MCAT exam*. [https://aamc-orange.global.ssl.fastly.net/production/media/filer\\_public/3e/40/3e40d52e-db53-4b2d-a126-340a9a26fd2a/2020\\_whats\\_on\\_the\\_mcat\\_content\\_outline.pdf](https://aamc-orange.global.ssl.fastly.net/production/media/filer_public/3e/40/3e40d52e-db53-4b2d-a126-340a9a26fd2a/2020_whats_on_the_mcat_content_outline.pdf)

Aspiring Docs. (n.d.). *What you need to know about the MCAT exam*. AAMC. <https://students-residents.aamc.org/choosing-medical-career/article/preparing-mcat-exam/>