

FREE GUIDE FOR ASPIRING DOCTORS

The Complete MCAT. Guide.

Everything Indian students need to know about the Medical College Admission Test — format, sections, scoring, syllabus, timelines and a proven preparation roadmap for US & Canada medical school admissions.

7.5 hrs

Total Test Length

230

Total Questions

472–528

Score Range

§ What's Inside This Guide

A complete, structured walkthrough — from understanding what the MCAT is, to building a study plan that gets you into your target medical school.

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Why This Guide?

Prepared by the EduQuest counselling team for Indian students exploring MD/DO pathways in the United States and Canada — the same team that guides students through UCAT, SAT and ACT admissions.

01 What Is the MCAT & Who Needs It

The **MCAT (Medical College Admission Test)** is a standardised, computer-based examination developed and administered by the **AAMC (Association of American Medical Colleges)**. Nearly every medical school in the United States — and most in Canada — requires an MCAT score as part of the admissions process for MD and DO programmes.

For Indian students, the MCAT has become increasingly relevant for those pursuing an undergraduate degree in the US (a "pre-med" track) before applying to medical school, as well as for students applying to Caribbean medical schools that accept international applicants. It tests not just science knowledge, but the reasoning and problem-solving skills medical schools consider essential for future doctors.

7.5 hrs

SEATED TIME

~6.25 hrs

ACTUAL TESTING TIME

4

SECTIONS

230

SCORED QUESTIONS

02 Exam Format & The Four Sections

The MCAT is entirely multiple-choice and computer-based, taken at official Pearson VUE test centres. It is divided into four distinct sections, each scored independently:

Section	Focus	Questions	Time
Chemical & Physical Foundations	Biology, general & organic chemistry, physics	59	95 min
CARS (Critical Analysis & Reasoning Skills)	Reading comprehension across humanities & social sciences passages	53	90 min
Biological & Biochemical Foundations	Biology, biochemistry, general & organic chemistry	59	95 min
Psychological, Social & Biological Foundations	Psychology, sociology, biology	59	95 min

Test-Day Structure

The full appointment (including check-in, a 10-minute break, a 30-minute lunch break, and two 10-minute breaks) runs approximately 7 hours 30 minutes. Most test centres require arrival 30 minutes before the scheduled start.

03 Content Breakdown by Subject

Roughly 90% of MCAT questions are passage-based (drawing on a stimulus passage or experiment), the remainder are discrete standalone questions.

Chemical & Physical Foundations of Biological Systems

- General Chemistry (~30%) — atomic structure, stoichiometry, thermodynamics, equilibrium
- Physics (~25%) — mechanics, fluids, electricity & magnetism, waves
- Organic Chemistry (~15%) — functional groups, reaction mechanisms
- Biochemistry (~25%) — enzymes, metabolism, macromolecules
- Biology (~5%)

Critical Analysis & Reasoning Skills (CARS)

Nine passages (500–600 words each) drawn from humanities and social sciences — ethics, philosophy, history, cultural studies. No prior subject knowledge is tested; only reading comprehension, reasoning within the text, and reasoning beyond the text.

Biological & Biochemical Foundations of Living Systems

- Biology (~65%) — cell biology, genetics, physiology, molecular biology
- Biochemistry (~25%) — enzyme kinetics, metabolic pathways
- General & Organic Chemistry (~10%)

Psychological, Social & Biological Foundations of Behaviour

- Psychology (~65%) — behaviour, cognition, learning, stress, identity
- Sociology (~30%) — social structures, demographics, inequality
- Biology (~5%) — neural & endocrine systems

Foundational Concepts & Scientific Inquiry

The AAMC organises all content around 10 "Foundational Concepts" and expects students to apply four core scientific reasoning skills: knowledge of concepts, scientific reasoning, reasoning about data/graphs, and research methods.

04 Scoring System Explained

Each of the four sections is scored on a scale of **118 to 132**, with 125 as the midpoint of each section. These four section scores are summed to give a total score ranging from **472 to 528**, with 500 as the midpoint.

Score Band	Total Score	Approx. Percentile
Below Average	472–493	Below 50th
Average	500–502	~50th
Competitive	510–514	~80th–86th
Highly Competitive	515–520	~90th–96th
Exceptional	521+	98th+

Percentiles shift slightly each year as the AAMC recalculates based on the most recent three-year testing pool.

05 Registration, Dates & Fees

- Registration is done through the AAMC's official portal (**aamc.org**) using an AAMC account.
- The MCAT is typically offered **25–30 times a year** between January and September at Pearson VUE centres, including several in India.
- Base registration fee: **US \$345** (Standard); AAMC's Fee Assistance Program reduces this for eligible US-based applicants (not typically available to international students).
- Rescheduling and late-registration incur additional fees, and international test-centre availability fills quickly — register 3–4 months ahead.
- Scores are released roughly **30–35 days** after the test date.

06 Eligibility for Indian Students

There is no nationality restriction — the MCAT can be taken by any student, anywhere. However, since the exam assumes a US-style pre-med curriculum (general biology, general & organic chemistry, physics, biochemistry, psychology, sociology), Indian students generally take it either:

- After completing relevant coursework in a US/Canadian undergraduate pre-med programme, or
- Independently, after self-study covering the AAMC's official content outline, if applying to Caribbean or international MD programmes that accept the MCAT.

Applicants should always confirm the exact MCAT/score requirements of each target university, as policies vary between US, Canadian and Caribbean medical schools.

07 6-Month Study Timeline

A commonly recommended runway is 300–350 hours of dedicated study, spread across 5–6 months.

Phase	Duration	Focus
Phase 1 — Content Review	Months 1–2	Work through all four subject areas systematically; build content notebooks
Phase 2 — Practice by Topic	Month 3	Section-wise question banks (UWorld, Kaplan) to test recall & identify weak areas
Phase 3 — CARS Drilling	Months 3–5 (daily)	Daily timed CARS passages — this section improves slowest and needs the most repetition
Phase 4 — Full-Length Practice Tests	Months 4–5	AAMC official full-lengths under real timing conditions, spaced 1–2 weeks apart
Phase 5 — Review & Taper	Final 2 weeks	Review error logs, light practice only, rest before test day

Pro Tip

Take your first full-length practice test *early* (even before finishing content review) to get an honest diagnostic baseline — it's far more useful for planning than waiting until you "feel ready."

Weekly Study Checklist Template

- ☐ 3–4 content review sessions covering one subject area
- ☐ Daily CARS passage practice (20–30 minutes)
- ☐ One timed practice question set per section
- ☐ Error log review — categorise mistakes as content gap vs reasoning error
- ☐ One rest day to avoid burnout

08 Best Prep Resources & Question Banks

Content Review

- Kaplan MCAT Complete 7-Book Set
- Princeton Review MCAT Subject Review
- AAMC Official Content Outline

Question Banks

- UWorld MCAT QBank
- AAMC Question Packs (official)
- Kaplan Qbank

Full-Length Practice Tests

- AAMC Official Full-Length Exams (most representative of the real test)
- AAMC Sample Test & Unscoed Sample
- Blueprint / Kaplan full-lengths for extra volume

CARS Practice

- AAMC CARS Question Packs 1 & 2
- Jack Westin daily CARS passages

09 MCAT vs NEET vs UCAT

Feature	MCAT	NEET	UCAT
Used For	US/Canada MD & DO	India MBBS/BDS	UK medical schools
Question Type	MCQ, passage-based	MCQ, direct recall	MCQ, timed reasoning
Tests Subject Knowledge?	Yes (deep)	Yes (deep)	No — aptitude only
Duration	7.5 hrs	3 hrs 20 min	2 hrs
Reasoning Component	CARS section	Minimal	Entire exam

10 Competitive Score Benchmarks

School Tier (Illustrative)	Typical MCAT Range
Top-20 US Medical Schools	518–528
Strong State/Private Medical Schools	510–517
Osteopathic (DO) Programmes	500–508
Caribbean International Medical Schools	495–505

These are illustrative bands only — always verify a specific school's published median MCAT and GPA on its official admissions page.

11 Common Mistakes to Avoid

- **Skipping AAMC official materials** — third-party prep is useful, but nothing mimics real MCAT question style like AAMC's own practice materials.
- **Under-practising CARS** — students with strong science backgrounds often neglect CARS, yet it's frequently the section that determines total score ceiling.
- **Passive review** — re-reading notes without active recall (flashcards, practice questions) is one of the least effective study methods for retention.
- **Not simulating real test conditions** — skipping full-length, timed, single-sitting practice tests leads to stamina issues on the actual 7.5-hour exam.
- **Registering too late** — popular test dates and international centres fill up months in advance.

Ready to Start Your MCAT Journey?

EduQuest's counselling team helps Indian students plan their pre-med pathway, choose the right MCAT timeline, and build a personalised study plan — the same support we provide for UCAT, SAT and ACT applicants.

What EduQuest Can Help With

- ☐ Personalised MCAT study timeline based on your target intake
- ☐ Guidance on US, Canadian & Caribbean medical school shortlisting
- ☐ Full-length mock test reviews with section-wise feedback
- ☐ End-to-end application & admissions counselling

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