

Figure Interpretation: Informing Future Doctors

MCAT Program

Link to test taking strategy video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJyQNEPJKYw>

You're starting to feel more comfortable with the passages. Your Flowchart is improving, you are aware of what Basic Sciences and Relationships look like, and you're starting to carve through these passages a bit more efficiently. But what the heck do you do with the figures?

That's a broad question because of how many different types of figures are on the MCAT. However, there's one thing I want you to protect when looking at these figures. Timing.

Do not spend a ton of time trying to interpret results from a figure that you may not even be tested on.

So, how do you approach figures on the MCAT?

In order to protect your timing and still be able to pull the relevant information from the figures, you must be very deliberate with your approach. To do this, you **MUST** understand the experiments that are laid out in the passage because the figures often represent graphically the results from the experiments that are described in the passage. Do not skim the experimental design.

Steps to Figure Interpretation:

1. Understand the written text given to you before you reach the passage
 - a. It goes without saying but having the rest of the passage properly orient you allows you to quickly read through and understand the figures.
2. Briefly skim figure to see what it's measuring
 - a. This could be as simple as noting that the figure is depicting the growth of an embryo or looking at the x-axis and y-axis to note the independent and dependent variables. This will change depending on the type of figure you're given.
3. Look for indicators of significant difference
 - a. These can include error bars that do not overlap, asterisks, or even p-values.
4. Read the figure caption to understand what the figure is truly depicting.
 - a. This is generally listed before tables and after figures. The attached video will show you where to find it.
5. **MOVE ON**

- a. The MCAT will generally refer you back to a figure in the question stem if you're expected to use that figure to answer the question. It is possible for them to test you on a figure without referring you back to it, but it's not common.

Drill to Practice Figure Interpretation:

1. With your Accountability Group, identify a passage with more than one figure and try to brainstorm 5 questions per student (and per figure) the MCAT authors could ask. Do this separately discuss your questions together. This exercise can also be done alone but the discussion and sharing of questions is where a lot of progress is made.

