

Timing Strategy: Informing Future Doctors

MCAT Program

Link to the test taking strategy video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xgj-Tyzc1RY&t=179sg>

Many people say time is the great equalizer. While we each have our own unique situations and talents in life, we all share the same 24-hours in one day. The MCAT is similar in that sentiment. Though each student will come in with a unique educational background and content mastery, you are all given the same amount of time to complete the test.

Timing is a struggle for almost every student on the MCAT. You have some students that blaze through the exam, but most students struggle to finish at least 2 of the 4 sections in the allotted amount of time.

During the exam, feeling rushed can cause a lot of unwanted stress and this can lead to huge test-day drops on your exam score. You end up creating unwarranted anxiety and wasting more time by thinking, “Oh man, I’m behind, how am I going to catch up?!”

This is the type of self-destructive thought process you likely had during your first practice test and it’s the very thing we want to avoid. The best way to avoid that is by making a Timing Chart. This is accomplished through a series of steps laid out below. But first, let’s understand the timing of the exam.

EXAM TIMING:

The timing trends for the science sections of the exam (CP, BB, PsS) are all the same, but they differ slightly from the CARS section. These trends are shown below:

Sciences: 59 Questions, 10 Passages,
95 minutes

- 3.5 minutes to read passage
- 1 minute to answer question

CARS: 53 Questions, 9 Passages, 90
minutes

- 3.5 minutes to read passage
- 30 seconds to write Main Idea
- 1 minute to answer question

For each science passage, it’s safe to give yourself 8-minutes total to read the passage and answer every question. Because most science passages are either 4 or 5 questions, this is a safe time limit.

CARS passages either have 5, 6, or 7 questions. This gives you 3.5 minutes to read the passage, 30 seconds to write your Main Idea (See Test-Taking Strategy 4) and 1-minute to

answer each question. Therefore, follow these timing conventions. 7 questions = 11 minutes, 6 questions = 10 minutes, 5 questions = 9 minutes.

- To calculate how many questions are in a passage, subtract the question you will end on from the question you will begin on and add 1. So, if this passage spans questions 13-19, I will say $19-13 = 6$ and add 1 to that giving me 7 total questions for this passage. Adding 1 allows you to include the question that you're currently on as part of that passage.

We will track this on test day using a timing chart.

Steps to creating a timing chart:

1. Identify how much time you have left for the entire section
 - a. You can find this in the top-right corner of your screen when taking the MCAT. Write that down!
2. Figure out how much time you should spend on each passage following the rules laid out previously. Subtract that from the amount of time you have left. That's how much time you should have remaining on the clock when you finish that passage.
 - a. EX: If I begin passage 1 of CP with 1:35 left on the clock and this passage should take me 8 minutes, I should finish with 1:27 left on the clock.
 - b. If I begin passage 3 of CARS with 1:10 left on the clock and the passage has 7 questions, I should subtract 11 minutes meaning I should finish this passage when the clock strikes 0:59. Give this some practice and it'll become second nature.
3. If you've spent over 1-minute on a question, guess, flag it, and MOVE ON
 - a. This takes practice and eventually you will develop an internal clock for what 1-minute feels like. For now, just focus on watching the clock loosely.

Goal: Become proficient with timing chart within 1 month.

Drill: Use timing chart in all Strategy Sessions and practice exams. This is a test-day strategy.

While it is my hope and desire that you get every question correct on the MCAT, keep in mind the fact that missing 1 question likely won't impact your score at all. Therefore, if you have spent over 1-minute on a question and are not close to figuring out the answer, guess between the answers you haven't eliminated and MOVE ON. Trust me, it's what's best.

Tips/Tricks for getting faster:

Making timing your strength is difficult and requires practice, but one thing you can do while you're not studying to help with timing is reading. Real books. Most timing struggles come from having to reread paragraphs or even entire passages because you didn't understand it at first. A great way to help with this reading comprehension is by reading 20-30 minutes a day. So, instead of scrolling on social media before you go to bed or first thing when you wake up in the morning, pick up a book instead. It sounds silly, but I've seen this help tons of students like yourself. It may not give you that instant dopamine hit that

getting 400 likes on your most recent booty pic does, but it will help you on your MCAT and likely unearth a habit that we all know we should be doing a little bit more of.

