

Final Preparations for the MCAT

William J. Higgins

Department of Biology

University of Maryland, College Park



Homework for this week.....

- Download & read MCAT info from Web
 - at least *MCAT Essentials* !
- Examine data & determine desired state of residence
- Identify potential letter writers
- Residency ?
- Begin to identify times and places in your schedule
- What do you need to study?

At this session,

- Answer questions about process & the MCAT
- Review of specific types of questions
- Strategies for attacking different types of questions
- Using those practice tests
- Leave time for individual consultation

Your Questions?

M.D. - Ph.D. Programs ?

M.D. - Ph.D. Programs

- Everyone is different
 - GRE ??
 - Admission to med school first or both simultaneously
 - Evidence of research aptitude is a real MUST
- Personal contact with potential research advisers!!!!
- Options for clinical research

What about post-bac programs?

- When are they recommended or required?
- Which ones are most beneficial?
- What are the outcomes?

Do they address the weaknesses in your application?

GPA for Applicants & Matriculants, 2007

	<u>Applicants</u> (42,315)		<u>Matriculants</u> (17,759)
GPA Science	3.39		3.59
GPA non-science	3.62	<-- 0.2 -->	3.73
GPA Total	3.49	<-- 0.1 -->	3.65

source: www.aamc.org/students/mcat

Do I need an MCAT review course ?

What about Early Decision ?

What about my financial situation?

and your questions are:

- Interview questions: theirs and mine
 - Do you need to have questions for them?
- How do I raise my MCAT score?
 - Practice, study & strategy
 - How many questions does it take?
- How do I maintain motivation?
- How do I evaluate my personal statement?

and your questions are:

- Creative ways to study best?
- Where do I get the best practice tests?
 - A word about hired test-takers & MCAT instructors
- How do I evaluate my improvement?
- an after thought: any learning disabilities?


On the horizon.....

Communication Skills section!!!

- What have you learned?
- What still remains unclear?
- What else should we discuss?
- Can you evaluate your application?
- Does any aspect of the application process intimidate you?

Statistics, 2007

	<u>Applicants</u>	<u>Matriculants</u>
#	42,315	17,759
VR	9.0	9.9
PHYS	9.2	10.3
BIOL	9.6	10.6
Writing	O	P
<i>Subject Averages</i>	27.8	30.8



The MCAT content:

www.aamc.org/mcat

So how do I begin to study?

1. Download Content!
2. Analyze Practice Tests
3. Textbooks !!!
4. Sample problems !!!

The most beneficial, helpful, and useful thing you can do to prepare.....

Take practice tests under **game** conditions!

Practice MCATs at

- www.e-mcat.com
 - Online
- www.aamc.org
 - Online and paper for sale
- Sample questions in PDF manual

Study groups or solo?

When do you finally learn and
understand something ?

When are you sure ?

Your study schedule

- Time on task
- Not every subject gets the same allotment
- Time of day
- Location, location, location
- Marathons don't work
- Mix up the subjects in your study schedule
- Calendar.....

Your study calendar

- When ?
- What ?
- Where ?
- Check for understanding !



DESPAIR

IT'S ALWAYS DARKEST JUST BEFORE IT GOES PITCH BLACK.

My objectives for today:

- Motivation
- Strategies
 - especially organization of effort
- Confidence

Motivation.....

MCAT scores do make a difference
and
you must have good ones!



Remember one important fact:

This **IS** a competition!!!



PESSIMISM

EVERY DARK CLOUD HAS A SILVER LINING,
BUT LIGHTNING KILLS HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE EACH YEAR WHO ARE TRYING TO FIND IT.

If you have

- the intelligence and intellectual abilities
- the academic background
- time to study
- a schedule and a strategy for preparation
- practice

You can/will do well!!



Remember our objective:

A few more right answers make a
significant difference

So I am motivated, have a set of proven strategies, and enough time to study and practice. All I need now is a schedule and the will to keep to it.

A word about the importance of
scheduling.....

Higgins's Recipe for MCAT Study

- Allow 3 to 4 months before MCAT
- Have a weekly schedule that makes sense
- Spend 10 - 12 hours per week
- Allocate 40% of your study time for taking practice tests
- Allocate 40% of this test taking time for Verbal Reasoning



Your progress ?

And your stress signal is?



PROCRASTINATION

HARD WORK OFTEN PAYS OFF AFTER TIME,
BUT LAZINESS ALWAYS PAYS OFF NOW.



BURNOUT

ATTITUDES ARE CONTAGIOUS. MINE MIGHT KILL YOU.

You have already

- made a question vs. time card for each of the sections.
 - You use it every time you take a practice test!
 - You always time yourself on a practice test!
- begun the process of identifying what specific topics you need to review.
- started to keep my schedule as we discussed.

Now we will

- Review of specific types of questions
- Strategies for attacking different types of questions in the different sections
- Leave time for individual consultation

Time / Question

Section	# of Questions	Time Allowed	Time/ Question
Physical Sciences	52	70 min	1.3 min or 78 sec
Verbal Reasoning	40	60	1.5 min or 90 sec
Writing	2	60	30 min
Biological Sciences	52	70	1.3 min or 78 sec



What to do with this
information?

Make a table of questions
completed by certain time
points for each section!

Example:

Question #	Time elapsed
15	20.2 minutes
30	40.4 minutes
45	60.5 minutes
52	70 minutes

You must practice under *game* conditions !

- Time every exam or exam section!
- Use the on screen clock to keep track of time elapsed without doing any calculations in your head!
- Know your Question # vs. Time progress

Physical & Biological Sciences

What is on the MCAT?

How much must I know?

Panel asked to rate potential topics on three criteria:

- Level of coverage received in basic undergraduate course sequences
- Importance to mastering the medical school curriculum; and
- Usefulness in the actions and decisions of medical practice.

Required Courses:

- Biology 1 & 2 (labs)
- General Chemistry 1 & 2 (labs)
- Organic Chemistry 1 & 2 (labs)
- Physics 1 & 2 (labs)
- English Composition & Literature
- Calculus 1 & 2

With the exception of Calculus and some “medical school related Biology”*, this tells you what to study at what level.

* Medical school related = physiology

Examining the Questions: Content Required

- Have you completed required courses?
- Review the downloaded content and compare to the content of at least two practice tests you completed.
 - You will know what to study
 - Do not rely on a miracle, but you must prioritize

Attacking the Biological Sciences & Physical Sciences sections

- Questions associated with passages (42) and 10 stand alone questions
- Step One: There are **FOUR (4)** types of questions !

The Four Types of Questions:

- The answer:
 - is in the passage
 - is in the graph or table
 - must be recalled from your knowledge
 - must be arrived at by deductive or inductive reasoning

Always look at where you're going...





Let's look and see....

If you need to improve, try this...

- For passages,
 - Skim / read the questions first
 - Label them as to type
 - Read the passage and data, looking for answers
 - Go back to questions and

**Do not look at the answers until
you have answered the question
if the answer isn't in the passage
or data!**

Other thoughts...

- Process of elimination when required
- Guessing is not penalized
 - Especially if the answer is not in the passage or data
- Keep up the pace
- Keep up the emotional energy
 - Example from 2000

**Always be ready for any
surprises in life...**



Verbal Reasoning

- Practice, practice, practice.....
- Keep up the pace or plod along?
 - Your personal strategy must be applied
- Remember when you can find the answer in the passage and when inference is required
- You must stay with it in practice and on the test!

Four possible strategies:

- Read passage, read & answer Q's going back to passages as necessary
- Skim & then read passage, then do Q's
- Skim, read Q's, read passage, do Q's
- Read Q's, read passage, do Q's



Writing Sample

Is it important?



MCAT Writing Sample Prompts


The AAMC provides the following examples of MCAT Writing Sample prompts for your information. These prompts are taken from past MCAT administrations, and will not be included in future administrations.

You will be given two Writing Sample prompts during the MCAT examination. Each consists of a topic statement (printed in bold) followed by instructions for three writing tasks. Your first task is to explain or interpret the topic statement. This does not vary across prompts. Instructions for the second and third writing tasks vary according to prompt. Be sure to follow the instructions for **all three tasks** when using this list for practice.

Examples

Politicians should vote according to their beliefs, without worrying about whether their constituents agree with those beliefs.

Write a unified essay in which you perform the following tasks. Explain what you think the above statement means. Describe a specific situation in which a politician should take into account the beliefs of constituents when voting. Discuss what you think determines whether politicians should vote according to their beliefs or those of their constituents.





Creative inspiration, rather than careful planning, often results in the best solution to a problem.

Write a unified essay in which you perform the following tasks. Explain what you think the above statement means. Describe a specific situation in which careful planning might result in the best solution to a problem. Discuss what you think determines whether creative inspiration or careful planning can best solve a problem



Writing sample

You are given a statement expressing an opinion.

First, explain what you think this means.

Second, explore the meaning by considering a circumstance in which the statement might not apply or be true.

Third, discuss ways in which the conflict might be resolved.

Writing Sample

- Two scores for each of two sections
 - Each evaluator awards a score of 1 to 6
- Sum of scores on two questions is converted to J to T scale (11 units on scores from 4 - 24)
- For example:
 - 3 & 3 on Part 1 and 5 & 6 on Part 2
 - Raw score of 17 converted to alphabetic to give distribution



To get a score of P?

≥ 59.5 percentile

So what do you do now?

- Strunk & White, *The Elements of Style*
- Examine and analyze sample essays on web site
- Practice writing timed essays with your study group, each analyzing the work of the group after understanding the scoring and letting them lay dormant for a few days.
 - **Read them aloud!!!**

So what do you do now?

- Get a logic or rhetoric book and formally examine some structures for arguments.

Next:

Scheduling your life

- Scheduling your weekly study time while having a life
- Final week preparations and strategies
- The 24 hours before the MCAT
 - Focus on the night before and morning of the big event.

Schedule items

- Review assessments
- Determine where you need more work
- Get out your day planner and schedule
- We will book study until two weeks before MCAT Saturday

Final Study Tactics

- How much time do I have in the next ?????? weeks?
- Identify where I should spend the time
 - You can't do everything - Time on Task !
 - Where is the time well spent?
- Schedule it!
- Live with it!



Remember an important fact:

Many intelligent people take the
MCAT. The intelligent and well
prepared do well.



My premise.....

You must employ a strategy for your
mental and physical wellness in
addition to your study plan



My premise.....

Practice tests under game conditions
are your best preparations if you
analyze and use the results wisely

Practicing Verbal Reasoning
Pays Off!

The final two weeks:

- Short term memory tasks
 - Equations
 - Math functions
 - Flash cards
- Final Verbal Reasoning & Writing Samples
- Many short, timed practice test sessions
- Resist the urge to disrupt your life!
 - Relaxation, exercise, and fun!
 - Note behaviors of those around you!



DEFEAT

FOR EVERY WINNER, THERE ARE DOZENS OF LOSERS.
ODDS ARE they're ONE OF THEM.

Do I take the MCAT week off
and spend 40 hours studying and
taking practice exams?



AGONY

NOT ALL PAIN IS GAIN.



The Final Week:

A final review of your progress one week before the testing date

In my schedule: I

- identified specific topics
- utilized times and locations that work for me
- avoided ‘marathons’
- broke up the material
- met my goals without disrupting my normal life
- I admit I am finished and prepared!

My week

- Sleep schedule
 - No late nights!
- Maintain exercise or begin to take walks
- Eat well !
- Do not clean your room or do your laundry if it isn't part of your routine.
- Go to the movies, pick up a book, or utilize some other reward.

and on Thursday & Friday, the day
before the MCAT,

I resume my normal life

I keep sharp by taking part of each section of
a test

no more than 3 hours total time!!!!

Friday night:

- Whatever
- Watch what you eat!!!!
- Be careful with medications
- Don't go to bed too early or too late
 - No naps!!!
- Look over what you have learned, realize how far you have come, and be confident.

Friday night:

- Lay out your clothes
 - Layers
- Pack your lunch and beverages
- Medications

Friday night:

Assemble what you need to bring:

Admission Ticket

MCAT ID card - completed & with photo

Official photo & signature ID

Saturday

- Be awake > 2 hours before the exam
- Shower and dress for success
- Eat sanely
 - Caffeine? Sugar?
- Walk and review 7 items (if you must!)
- Arrive to the site early but do not enter early
- Avoid stress mongers
- Be prepared for the unprepared



Saturday:

Are any of you traveling a long
distance to the test site?

Are you familiar with the test site?

At the test site:

- 8:00 AM admission
 - Do not freak out at the problems of others
- Be prepared for ID examination and thumb print
- Get comfortable
- What will you do while you wait for the exam to begin?
- Follow all directions and time allowances

Exam strategies

- On the clock!
- How much time per question?
 - Construct a table: time vs. question number
- Other strategies?
- Your enemies are fatigue and panic
 - Adrenalin surge subsides
 - You will not get every question correct



and when it's all over,

Go and have fun in the meadows...



Your final questions.....

Bill Higgins:

higginsconsult@gmail.com