

MCAT Preparation: Tips & Advice

Dartmouth courses have prepared you well, but you will still need to thoroughly prepare before taking the MCAT! To help you study and prepare successfully, we have provided some tips and advice below. As always, feel free to reach out to your Pre-Health Assistant Deans if you have questions, concerns, or would like help with creating a study plan.

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How long should I study?

Students/applicants average 10-12 weeks of concentrated, dedicated daily study, including time allotted for full-length practice exams.

- Choose a timeframe when you can follow a dedicated study plan and fully prepare.
- Combine your study plan with enough time and discipline to treat your daily preparation like a full-time, committed job.
- Adjust your other commitments accordingly.
- Some students/applicants may wish to have that timeline extended depending on their own study styles and needs.

Who can I go to for advice?

Peers and alumni who have already taken the MCAT are a great source of advice to develop your study/preparation plan. They will often freely share the structured plan that helped them succeed.

- Ensure your plan suits your style and needs.
- Do you need a longer study plan? Are there certain areas that require extra review?
- You are always welcome to schedule a meeting with our Pre-Health Assistant Deans for additional advice.

When should I plan to study for the MCAT?

- Some people study during an off-term and may also include a part-time internship or job during that time.
- Some people study during an on-term, often with a two-course or lighter load.
- Adjust your timeline if you recognize you need further preparation upon approaching your test date. There is a cost to changing your test date, so the sooner you recognize this, the better!
- Ideally, prepare to take the MCAT once. While there are some situations where someone may need to retake the MCAT, it is different from the SAT.
 - All scores show. It is also a significant time and financial investment.

- Strong preparation on the front end allows most people to have a single MCAT.

What score should I aim for?

- Our recent MCAT median has been 517. We highly recommend setting your goal score in that range and above. However, there can be a range of accepted scores based on an applicant's background and experiences. Please check in with your Pre-Health Assistant Deans to gauge your goal score.
- Take note of your practice scores. If you are unsure of your readiness before taking the real exam, check in with your Pre-Health Assistant Deans to help decide your plan of action – or to debrief after you receive your score.
- It is also recommended that you look at the average MCAT scores for the schools you wish to apply to.

What resources should I use?

- For wonderful tips about studying for the MCAT, make sure to watch this terrific video by Medical Education Learning Specialist Shavonia Wynn, PhD. [Start your MCAT prep right with Proven Learning Strategies](#).
- Use the [AAMC/MCAT practice tests](#) even if you use other resources.
- Use question banks and practice questions. The AAMC provides some, as well as many testing companies, and you can often purchase just those, and sometimes on sale. Aim to take at least 6-8 full-length practice exams and several in real time to train in similar conditions as your actual test date to build your stamina. Practice exams and questions are the best way to gauge how you're doing.
- For CARS practice, read articles from the Sunday New York Times, the Guardian, the Atlantic, or other publications with longer articles/essays. If reading and time are a factor, start timing yourself to get more accustomed. Ask what you perceive as key points.
- Only about 50 percent of Dartmouth students surveyed took a prep course, and 50 percent did not.
- If you are someone who needs structure and accountability, investing in a course can be useful.
- Considering the costs, keep in mind that with excellent preparation, you can still do well on the MCAT without taking a prep course as long as you develop and commit to a study plan.
- Courses sometimes have financial aid services, but are still quite costly. If you anticipate a need for one plan to save money.
- You can find preparation resources listed on the [HPP website](#). We don't promote any particular resources, but are happy to share what we hear from other advisors around the country and your peers. There is more than what we list.
- You may even be able to borrow or buy prep resources at a lower cost from someone who has already taken the MCAT.

Is there help available to offset the costs?

The AAMC does have a [Fee Assistance Program \(FAP\)](#) to help defray the cost of the MCAT and AMCAS application.

- **IMPORTANT NOTE!** You must apply for and be approved for the FAP before you sign up and pay for the MCAT. It is NOT retroactive!
- If you qualify for the FAP, you also receive it for the AMCAS application (within a certain timeframe).
- If you miss the FAP eligibility by a tiny fraction, it can't hurt to contact the FAP Office directly. They are constantly changing their policy during COVID.
- If you do sign up for the MCAT before getting approved, you can still apply to get approved for the actual application process.

