

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?

Most students spend 10–12 weeks in focused, daily study, including time for full-length practice exams.

- Choose a timeframe when you can follow a dedicated study plan and fully prepare.
- Treat your daily preparation like a full-time job — it takes real time and discipline.
- Adjust your other commitments accordingly.
- Some students may want a longer timeline, depending on their study style 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.
- Consider whether you need a longer study plan or extra review in certain content areas.
- You are always welcome to schedule a meeting with a Pre-Health Advisor 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.
- If you realize you need more time as your test date approaches, adjust your timeline as soon as possible — rescheduling costs money, so the sooner you decide, the better.
- Plan to take the MCAT only once, if possible. Unlike the SAT, retaking the MCAT is a bigger decision:
 - All your scores are reported to schools — a retake doesn't erase the earlier score — and retaking is also a significant time and financial investment.
 - Strong preparation the first time is what allows most students to take the MCAT just once.

What score should I aim for?

- Our recent applicants' median MCAT score has been 517, and we recommend aiming for that score or higher. That said, accepted scores vary based on your background and experiences — check in with your Pre-Health Advisor to set a goal score that fits your situation.
- Track your practice scores. If you're unsure whether you're ready for the real exam, check in with your Pre-Health Advisor — they can help you decide on a plan of action beforehand, or debrief with you after you get your score.
- It's also worth looking up the average MCAT scores for the schools you plan to apply to.

What resources should I use?

- **Practice tests and questions.** For MCAT study strategies, watch this 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're also using other resources, and supplement with question banks from the AAMC or testing companies (often sold individually, sometimes on sale). Aim for at least 6–8 full-length practice exams, several taken under real timed conditions, to build stamina — practice exams are the best gauge of how you're doing.
- **CARS practice.** Read longer articles or essays from publications like the Sunday New York Times, the Guardian, or the Atlantic. If reading speed is a factor, start timing yourself, and practice identifying what you see as each piece's key points.
- **Prep courses.** Some students take prep course and some do not — both paths can work. A course can help if you want built-in structure and accountability, but with a strong, committed study plan, you can also do well without one. Courses are costly, and while some offer financial aid, it's still a significant expense, so budget ahead if you think you'll want one.
- **Other resources.** See the [HPP website](#) for more preparation resources; we don't promote any particular ones but are happy to share what we hear from advisors and peers — there's more out there than what we list. You may also be able to borrow or buy prep materials at a lower cost from someone who has already taken the MCAT. **Additionally, HPP has several MCAT textbooks at our office that you are welcome to use!**

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'll also receive assistance for the AMCAS application, as long as you apply within the required timeframe.
- If you narrowly miss the FAP eligibility cutoff, it's still worth contacting the FAP Office directly. Their policies do change from time to time, so it's worth double-checking your options.
- If you sign up for the MCAT before your FAP approval comes through, you can still apply for FAP assistance for the AMCAS application process.