

MCAT Workshop Student Panel

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People: Kathryn, Jasmine, Kayla, Brady

How many practice exams did you take?

- Jasmine – I took 7 practice exams in total, taking a practice test every two weeks, initially. I recommend looking at practice full-length tests, practice questions, and practice MCAT sections through Kaplan and AAMC. I took my diagnostic test one year in advance because I knew I was going abroad for coop. As I got closer to the exam date I took a practice exam every weekend. I did my practice exams in test conditions, going through the whole process like I would on test day. I found the AAMC tests to be the most helpful, and very similar to the actual test. Kaplan practice exams were more focused on content that is in their books, so don't be discouraged by Kaplan practice test scores.
- Katherine – I took 11 practice tests, which is too much practice tests looking back; you definitely do not need to take that many. I took a diagnostic test first and then did content review only for the first two months. The following two months, I started doing practice questions, then more and more practice exams closer to test day in a simulated test environment.
- Brady – I took a free Princeton diagnostic/practice test 1 every month. When I was on coop from October to January, I picked up the pace and studied harder for my MCAT; I later took two MCATs in January.
- Kayla – In total I took 6 or 7 practice tests. However the bulk of these practice tests happened between the time I took my first exam in January, and the time I took my second exam in July. One of my biggest regrets is initially rushing my plan to take the MCAT sooner rather than later, especially since I was studying for my first MCAT test during an intense course in biochemistry and physics 2. I do recommend to take one practice test once a week, every week, leading up to the exam date. However, it's up to you as to how to study and prepare for your MCAT; you should know what study methods work best for you and where you have your strengths and weaknesses in terms of the materials covered. Lastly you never feel 100% confident after you finish a practice test, or even the MCAT, mainly because it is an insane amount of information to memorize, learn, and apply for problem solving.

If you took a diagnostic test and then a practice test, how much did your score change?

- Kathryn- My points went up by 6.
- Jasmine- I took a much-needed, 1.5 week break from studying, and my AAMC score went up by approximately 6-9 points. However the deflation is weird and there is a gap in the scores.

- Brady- When I took my Princeton Review, diagnostic test, I was 21 points away from achieving and beating the MCAT mean. My advice is to get good study materials, because the brand of your MCAT prep is important; you can also talk to friends and see how your friends study. Lastly, you can use a 3rd party study site, like reddit premed. However, it truly depends on the person, what works for them and what they find helpful.

How did you create an initial study plan?

- Jasmine- I bought Kaplan prep book and decided to teach myself and self-review the contents. I found this to not be the best idea, since the contents get overwhelming and it just became harder to keep up. Therefore, I printed weekly calendars and set goals for myself that were achievable. This was especially helpful towards the nearing of my test date; I would have rollover questions that I got wrong from my practice tests, and I would review them at the end of each week.
- Kathryn- During my last two months, I had a precise schedule; however, I should have done more scheduling earlier, since passively reading the material in a Kaplan test book does not help you. You need to engage in active reading, so that you can receive, process, and analyze the information. The test is more about analyzing and problem solving using the information you know than just pure memorization. However you should think about how you study best and what works for you.
- Brady- I operate best under pressure, so I started studying for my January MCAT exams in September for about 10-20 hours a week. I picked up pace in October, and I found that constantly testing yourself and taking practice tests will help you feel more comfortable with the 8 hour time commitment, as well as learn what testing strategies work best for you. The test is more about problem solving rather than pure memorization, so know how to apply what you learned.
- Kayla- Towards the nearing of my MCAT test date, I based my studying habits and the content I felt I needed to study, off of my practice test. I saw how well I did on it and I took those results to cater my studying towards what you need and what you know will help you do your best. However do not just study one subject or one particular content; try to integrate aspects of certain aspects so that you see the connections and understand how they all work and coincide with one another.

What are the most important things to focus on in the last two months?

- Brady- You should focus on questions, especially if you are a slow reader.
- Jasmine- Reviewing AAMC material and doing practice questions and sections from AAMC 3 weeks prior to the test date helped me become more acquainted with MCAT style questions; I would even say the AAMC question style is very similar to the full length MCAT, so definitely practice using those. Also do the question pack from AAMC within 2 months of your test.

- Kayla- I used the single section test for Kaplan, which helped me assess how I was doing on one particular section.
- Kathryn- I used Uworld, which has amazing content and explanations on different topics. Definitely a good practice for additional questions and for content review.

Did you use the Princeton Review?

- Brady- I know that Princeton Review goes more in detail with chemistry, biology, and physics. I used Khan Academy for sociology and psychology and also used reddit. I wanted to get the science content done first and master it first, which was fairly easy for me to do. However it is important to note that CARS isn't always correctly reflected in practice tests, and it would be wise to use AAMC and Khan Academy, since those had helpful explanations for the CARS problems I got wrong. I would recommend to pace your time and write a word or a short phrase for each paragraph in each reading section, since you can read and occasionally forget. I later integrated practice tests throughout studying so I knew what to focus on. MCAT passages aren't always in one area, so it is helpful to mirror that while studying.
- Kayla- Examine your practice books and go on examcrackers to get more prep and practice with the MCAT. The triaging technique is good for the humanities passages, since you get a feel for what the passage is about.
- Kathryn- Do not freak out about this and remember that it's about you and how your study testing strategies help you get a better score on the test. However all possible testing strategies and techniques that you find and come up with should be tried out on practice tests not on the day of the test.
- Jasmine- I was slow on the CARS section too and usually got through 3-4 passages; later I incorporated the triage technique from kaplan, where I mapped out passages and marked the questions that I knew were easier for me and the ones I knew were harder. This way I backloaded time so that I had more time for my harder questions. Definitely, taking a lot of practice test allows you to see what works and what's best for you.

How did you break down the mastery of each subject/topic?

- Kayla- I stuck to initially studying and reviewing one subject, and as time progressed, I integrate and intertwined more subjects with one another towards the end. It helped me see how things connect. However, when you choose to do this is all dependant on your timeline. It is overwhelming in the beginning but you'll get better at it as time passes.
- Brady- You can study a chapter a week, but integrating all of the information as the weeks go by, is crucial to learning how all of the material connects; you can use this skill to problem solve moving forward on the exam. Use Kaplan and find resources that work best for you.

- Kathryn- Integrating subjects and contents is hard initially, but it'll get easier as time passes and you see what you struggle with and what you know. However it is really crucial that you don't study just one subject every week.

How do you work through practice exam and learn from them?

- Jasmine- I took the test on Saturday and on Sunday, I went through test see what I got wrong. I wrote down questions that I missed, and in the beginning I would try to find trends(content/type); in the end, I would try to find the answer. I also used excel sheet.
- Kathryn- I took a practice test on Saturday, and on Sunday I would review it. Some days it took hours to figure out a problem, sometimes it took about 1.5 hours. It's important to look at what types of questions you get wrong and think about how you would problem solve.
- Brady- I would take test Saturday and review it that day 2-3 hours after I took it. It was fresh in my mind and I remembered well what I was thinking and why I picked that answer. Everything except CARS was subjective, but AAMC and khan academy helped me the most. The AAMC tests were a much better indicator on where I struggled and how I should study/approach the question to get it right.
- Kayla- I looked based on the content missed not questions missed. I tried to study several subjects at once, and tried not to create too many study materials. If you create too many study materials, you will most likely get stressed, therefore it is better to write, highlight, and categorize all of the information from the content you missed. That way, you see what you need to go through and review immediately.

Do you usually use up all of the time for a test?

- Brady- On my first practice test, I ran out of time. It's okay, you might too. You just have to develop testing strategies that work for you along the way. It is important to pace yourself and measure how fast you need to be. Take the time to review the questions you got wrong and the reason, then implement this into future studying.
- Kathryn- There are a lot of details on the test, so it would be good to know how to pull out the correct information from a problem. Furthermore, feeling confident and not letting the stress get to you would also be a good tactic. Keep track of what you know and don't know, and plan out on how you would use the breaks provided.
- Kayla- Take the breaks provided.
- Jasmine- It depended on the testing day for me; my patterns were very inconsistent. So it was hard to get a strategy down. However it would be wise to get a strategy for when you run out of time or if you end up with too much time; usually if you end up with free time, you should go back through material and re-read it. After I slowed down, I did better because I was able to distinguish which information on the test was important and which

was not helpful to me. Lastly, the test doesn't feel long once you take it every week, so do a lot of practice tests.

Do you have any tips for the actual test day?

- Kayla- You should go to the test center before your testing day, as to eliminate test day anxiety. Also you should take out your earrings, since the headphones used can be quite uncomfortable and distracting.
- Brady- I agree; in fact I ubered because I didn't want to be late. Wear comfortable clothing since you will be in the same room for approximately 8 hours.
- Kathryn- Water was not allowed, so I felt dehydrated for some portion of the test, which was a bit distracting. Therefore control the things that you can control; certain habits or internal distractions that you know about yourself can be dealt with by some method (usually taking many practice tests will show you how you make yourself be the most comfortable on your testing day). Do not study the day before!
- Jasmine- Trust your prep; you have spent so much time, energy, and money working with it, that you should realize that this is your cap. Do your best on every section and remember that every section you finish, there will be some uncertainty on if you did well or not. You will never feel amazing and fully confident that you knew everything for a section, so just be confident and don't freak out. Don't let one section cloud your mind with fear, doubt, and anxiety.

What did you do in your past exams when you noticed you were running out of time?

- Kayla- Do not panic; the more you panic, the more you tend to make mistakes. Don't let a whole section ruin your 8 hour test. Move on to the next question and put it in the back of your head. Do the easy questions first, so you can answer fast, while having time for your harder questions that you most likely left behind.
- Brady- There is an opportunity to flag questions you don't know if you are doing an online test or a practice test. Usually it is best to keep going and skip the harder questions, just so that you can get correct as many of the easy questions as you possibly can. Later you can go back to the questions you left blank, but it is beneficial to do this since all of the questions are graded the same.
- Kathryn- Just put down your gut response answer, because it usually is right, but also because you don't have time to check if you are right.

How do the testing breaks work?

- Jasmine- You usually seal your phone in bag, have to do a palm scan, have to have ID (which will be scanned), enter your fingerprints, get pat down, and get a locker. In between breaks, you will have water and snacks. You have to scan every time you enter the testing room, so leave extra time to scan and enter the testing room. You shouldn't

think about test on your test day; try to listen to music and have a good time. There is nothing you can do right before the test, so do not cram; it will not benefit you. There is a difference between procrastinating and taking a break; I took a 1.5 week off of studying, which helped me immensely to just give myself a break. You can step away from studying for a little bit, and if you need a break take a break. A happier student will do better than someone who is stressed. Whatever day of the week, regardless of how you are feeling, make time for yourself. Most important thing you can do.

- Kayla- There are cameras on your test and in the room. I listened to music on the train ride to the testing site, which put me in a good and relaxed mood; it's just important to postpone your stress, when you're a week away from taking the official test. Also, not everything will go according to plan, since I wanted to apply to med school in the middle of my 3rd year, but I ended up applying to med school until my 4th year. I felt more prepared, and would totally say that it is fine to postpone the perfect date.
- Kathryn- It was not that stressful, since you get to the testing center, and follow their instructions from there.
- Brady- It would be wise to visit the testing site beforehand, since it would take away some anxiety (the anxiety of being late and getting lost) on testing day. I also did a lot of group studying and it was helpful to have friends to go through it with and motivate each other. Make sure you take one night a week just to do something fun and reset. Don't study the night before your exam!