

## 4 tips to help you master the MCAT's CARS section

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Much of the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) is based on what students already know. Three of the exam's four sections—biological and biochemical foundations of living systems; chemical and physical foundations of biological systems; and psychological, social, and biological foundations of behavior—require prior content knowledge.

A fourth section, critical analysis and reasoning skills (commonly referred to as CARS), is based largely on inference.

Because of that, the CARS section may be more difficult to study for. Petros Minasi, senior director of pre-health programs at Kaplan Test Prep, offered some tips to help students in their preparation for CARS.

### Read complex content

The CARS section is specifically testing students on their ability to read a passage and answer questions based on that passage. They fall into three categories: comprehension-based questions, questions that one could answer based on reasoning within the text, and questions that one could answer based on reasoning beyond the text.

So, Minasi said, it makes sense to become a better reader. One way to do that is by reading sophisticated periodicals.

“Early on, students try to take everything in at once, as opposed to being able to look at a specific paragraph and summarize it,” he said. “You need to learn how to go through the passages and understand the purpose of each paragraph and the passage as a whole. The best way to do so is by reading the newspaper. I don't mean your grocery store tabloid. We're talking about high-level writing, like the *The New Yorker*, *The Economist* or *The Wall Street Journal*.”

## Start preparing early

CARS is likely to be different from any other type of exam a student has taken, so it will probably require the most prep time.

“There’s nothing that prevents a student from thinking about that section even if they are not formally preparing for the MCAT,” Minasi said. “Students can take action and expose themselves to the types of material that the section will cover, which is the humanities and the social sciences. It is a core analysis skill that will carry forward into medical school.”

## Look for specific words and phrasing

While the passages are all going to be different, they are likely to carry some common phrases. An ability to recognize those can go a long way.

“We train students on how to read the passages and identify keywords,” he said. “For instance, if I were to say to you, ‘in conclusion,’ regardless of what I’m about to say, you already know it’s my conclusion. So we train students on how to see those keywords and transitional words that are road signs saying this is where you’re going to end up.”

## Avoid falling for absolutes

Minasi spoke of a few “wrong-answer pathologies” that students should recognize.

“There’s a distinct difference between me saying ‘this is the only pizza I will ever eat’ and ‘this is my favorite pizza place,’” he said. “The first one is an extreme statement. In the written word, rarely are extreme statements correct on the MCAT. So, boom, you can eliminate that as a potential correct answer.”