Thrive on the MCAT by following this advice

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The Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) is one of the most factored metrics in whether a student gets into medical school—though admissions offices are striving to enhance holistic admissions methods. Each year, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), more than 85,000 students take the exam.

The AMA has gathered expert advice to help you achieve your best MCAT score and boost your chances of medical school admission.

For students preparing for the exam in the 2020 testing cycle, the COVID-19 pandemic has thrown a curveball into their plans—as it has for the entire medical school admissions process.

While administrations of the MCAT have restarted, the exam was suspended for more than a month of prime test-taking time during the height of the pandemic. Administrations of the exam will take place through late September, though there are some key differences to the exam, including length and the times at which it is offered.

Some MCAT advice is applicable in any testing cycle. In channeling expert advice for prospective test-takers, there are many keys to succeeding on the exam. Here are a few of the most important insights.

**Know what you are getting into**

While you may have scored favorably on standardized tests such as the American College Test (ACT) and Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), the MCAT is a totally different animal.
“It’s a year’s worth of organic chemistry, a year’s worth of general chemistry, a year’s worth of physics, a year’s worth of general biology, a semester’s worth of upper division biochemistry, and topics from introductory psychology and sociology—there’s simply a lot of content that’s coming into play, and the big mistake is students think it’s the exact same skill,” said Petros Minasi, senior director of prehealth programs at Kaplan Test Prep.

Persistence can pay off
According to a survey of more than 15,000 matriculating first-year medical students conducted by the AAMC, about 30% took the MCAT two or more times prior to getting accepted to medical school. Andy Chen, a medical student at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine, took it multiple times.

“Really take your time and wait until you are fully ready to sit for the exam,” Chen said. “Readiness can be assessed by a self-reflection of one’s mastery of the content knowledge and performance on practice questions and exams.

Read complex content
Three of the MCAT’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 (CARS), is based largely on inference. CARS is specifically testing students on their ability to read a passage and answer questions based on that passage. So, it makes sense to become a better reader. One way to do that is by reading sophisticated periodicals.

Set a study schedule
When preparing for the Medical Colleges Admission Test, experts recommend studying between 300 and 350 hours. The hours you log are one thing; how you log them is another. One expert offered insight on how prospective medical students can build the ideal program to maximize their score on one of the most important aspects of a medical school application.

Medicine can be a career that is both challenging and highly rewarding but figuring out a medical
school's prerequisites and navigating the application process can be a challenge unto itself. The AMA premed glossary guide has the answers to frequently asked questions about medical school, the application process, the MCAT and more.

Have peace of mind and get everything you need to start medical school off strong with the AMA.