Testing Solutions' 30 Day Guide to MCAT CARS Success:

Howdy! My name is Nick Zehner, and I'm an MS3 at Stanford. I started Testing Solutions 5 years ago to help students struggling with the hardest section on the MCAT, the CARS. With so much conflicting advice out there, it can be hard to know where to turn to get a tried and true method that actually works, not just for one person, but for thousands. That's been the goal of this thread/guide for the last 5 years, and I'm proud that it's worked so well for so many.

This guide will answer all your questions and even some you didn't know you had. It's meant to be exhaustive and provide you with everything you need to know to achieve an ultra-high CARS score. It is your step-by-step guide to getting you from the couch to MCAT CARS success. If you have any questions, I hope you'll feel free to ask them on here. I try my very best to respond within a day or two. Hope to talk with you soon!

So, how should I use this guide? Here are the steps I recommend:

Step 1: Why Should I Trust You?

This is an excellent question! One of the hardest parts of studying for the CARS is all the conflicting advice out there. I highly recommend that you find a resource you trust completely and stick with it. Just because some strategy supposedly worked one time for someone on SDN doesn't mean it will work consistently. Use tried and true methods from people who know the CARS well. There are a number of reasons why I think you should trust me, but the top two are:

1) I'm qualified.

- I scored in the 99th percentile on the MCAT.
- I'm an MS3 at Stanford
- Testing Solutions' resources have more than (525) 4.5-star reviews on Amazon.
- I taught and tutored for the country's largest MCAT company for nearly two years.
- This guide/thread has over 280,000 views and 700+ posts. It's the most popular guide to the CARS on SDN.
- I've spent thousands of hours studying and analyzing the AAMC released CARS practice materials, and I've written/edited over 150 CARS passages.
- If you'd like to hear a little more about me personally, my journey to medicine at Stanford, as well as some top CARS tips, I was interviewed by the podcast "Perspective Doctor." You can listen to the episode here!
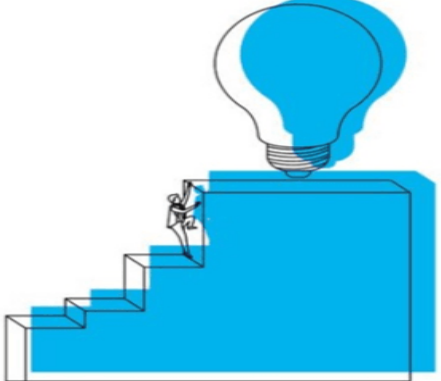
2) My approach produces results!

I've helped hundreds of students personally and thousands of students online with the CARS. Since our founding, we've sold over 50,000 CARS practice tests! Check out the impressive results of just a few of my recent students who took the MCAT in 2018.

Step 2: Get Started Quickly! Sign-Up for Our 8-day Jump-Start Email Course!

This CARS Jump-Start email course will especially be useful for students who are not taking the MCAT for a while but want to get a head start and begin preparing now! You really can't start preparing for the CARS too early, and in an ideal world, you'd start months before you begin your dedicated study period. This course gets you started on the right foot.

With that said, it's been designed to help everyone so regardless of where you are at on your CARS journey, this 8-day CARS Jump-Start email course will provide you with the very highest yield CARS strategies and tactics that you can start putting into practice today!

Step 3: Watch the Intro Video to Learn More about the 2019 CARS Bootcamp!

Step 4: Download the Table of Contents and Get Started on Day1!

If you're ready to start going through this 30-Day Guide to CARS Success, we recommend you download our "Table of Contents" PDF. It can be time-consuming to find the correct day's post due to all the questions users have posted through the years, so we've created this "Table of Contents" PDF which has links to each day's post. You just open the PDF and can use it to jump directly to the post/ day you're on. Download your "Table of Contents" here!

Table of Contents | Schedule to MCAT CARS Success:

While our study guide is 30 days long, most MCATers will need roughly 90 days to get to an MCAT CARS score they'll be happy with. I've outlined the schedule I recommend to my students below, as well as the materials that you'll need to complete the schedule.

Here Are the Materials I Recommend:

- *Exam Krackers 101 Passage in MCAT Verbal Reasoning (EK101)'*
  - Note that this is the "old MCAT." EK's New CARS book is very bad and I cannot recommend anyone use it.

- Testing Solutions' 144 CARS Practice Passages via the 2019 CARS Bootcamp

- Exam Krackers Full-Length MCAT Practice Tests 1 – 5

- AAMC Official MCAT Sample Test

- AAMC Official MCAT Practice Exam (Scored) 1, 2, & 3

- AAMC CARS Question Packs 1 & 2

- Here's our Review of All CARS Materials Available on the Market!

Phase I - For the first 30 days, while you cover the major strategy points in this guide, I recommend you use passages from either EK 101 or TPR. In this phase of your preparation, you'll do a total of 69 passages. I'll explain how and when to do these passages in the guide.

Phase II - In the next 30 days, you'll take 14 CARS Full-Length Practice Tests. I recommend using Testing Solutions' Practice Tests (T1-T16) as well as your remaining passages from EK101 and TPR. You'll also use the AAMC Question Packs. In this phase, you'll do 126 passages.

Phase III - In the final 30 days, your CARS prep will largely be integrated with your taking of full-length MCAT practice tests. I have you taking all three of EK's full-lengths, four of Next Steps' full-lengths, and the four available AAMC practice tests. There are break days built in so. One some break days, you'll do one passage, just to keep you sharp, while on other break days, you'll just rest. In this final phase of your preparation, you'll do 85 passages. Thus, if you follow this schedule to the "T," you'll do 361 CARS practice passages. If you do that many practice passages, and follow the techniques I outline in this guide, you'll come as close to a guarantee of scoring 129+ on the CARS section as is possible. I have never had a student that has actually followed this schedule and not be happy with their score.

This schedule was designed to fit into whatever general schedule/ approach you're employing for the other three sections. Most days, you'll spend around an hour and a half on CARS, but sometimes more will be required. The key to mastering the CARS is to do a little bit each day. You cannot cram for the CARS. This section must be respected. Just like how you eat an elephant, remember that it's just one bite at a time, one day at a time. WARNING: Do not get behind on this schedule. If you're worried about that, build in some extra break days at the end of the schedule (Which is to say, start this schedule 100 days out from your test instead of 90, however, the compressed and rigorous nature of this schedule does build your stamina and prepares you for the rigors of test day, so don't let too much time lapse between practice tests.) It is not possible to do two days in one to catch up.

Week I:

In Week I, you'll do one passage per day.

Day 1 – The Plan/ Getting Your Materials
Day 2 – Breaking Down the MCAT CARS Section
Day 3 – Reviewing/ Timing
Day 4 – MCAT CARS Myths: The "Don'ts"
Day 5 – How to Approach the MCAT CARS Section – The Passage
Day 6 – Passage Types: Argumentative
Day 7 – Argumentation: Modality

Week II:

In Week II, you'll do two passage per day, timed individually.
Day 8 – Passage Types: Descriptive
Day 9 – How to Use Keywords
Day 10 – Health, Wellness, and Stress Management – The Second Key
Day 11 – CARS Question Types: The Main Idea
Day 12 – CARS Question Types: Passage Detail
Day 13 – CARS Question Types: Implication
Day 14 – CARS Question Types: Inference *Break -Don't do any passages today.*

Week III:

In Week III, you'll do three passage per day, timed individually.

Day 15 – CARS Question Types: Application
Day 16 – CARS Question Types: Integration of New Information
Day 17 – CARS Question Types: Attitude
Day 18 – CARS Question Types: Meaning of a Term
Day 19 – CARS Question Types: Author Technique
Day 20 – CARS Question Format: Negation Questions
Day 21 – CARS Question Format: Roman Numerals *Break -Don't do any passages today.*

Week IV:

In Week IV, you'll do four passage per day until the 25th and then do five passages per day. Do the passages consecutively, timed together.

Day 22 – CARS Answer Pathologies – Part I
Day 23 – CARS Answer Pathologies – Part II
Day 24 – CARS Answer Pathologies – Part III
Day 25 – How to Take a CARS Full-Length Practice Test
Day 26 – How to Review a CARS Passage
Day 27 – How to Review CARS Questions
Day 28 – How to Review CARS Answers *Break - Don't do any passages today.*

Week V:

You'll do six passages on Day 29 and Day 30. Do the passages consecutively, timed together.

Day 29 – Putting it All Together: How to Review an Entire CARS Practice Test
Day 30 – Advanced Study Techniques
Day 31 – **9 Passages from EK101 or TPR** *(90 Minutes)*

Day 32 – Review 9 Passages

Day 33 – **9 Passages from EK101 or TPR** *(90 Minutes)*

Day 34 – Review 9 Passages

Day 35 – **Break - Don't do any passages today.*

Week VI:

Day 36 – **9 Passages from EK101 or TPR** *(90 Minutes)*

Day 37 **–** Review 9 Passages

Day 38 – **T1 – Testing Solutions CARS Full-Length Practice Test T1**

Day 39 – Review T1

Day 40 – **T2 – Testing Solutions CARS Full-Length Practice Test T2**

Day 41 – Review T2

Day 42 **–** **Break - Don't do any passages today.*

Week VII:

Day 43 – **T3 – Testing Solutions CARS Full-Length Practice Test T3**

Day 44 – Review T3

Day 45 – **T4 – Testing Solutions CARS Full-Length Practice Test T4**

Day 46 – Review T4

Day 47 – **T5 – Testing Solutions CARS Full-Length Practice Test T5**

Day 48 – Review T5

Day 49 –**Break - Don't do any passages today.*

Week VIII:

Day 50 – **T6 – Testing Solutions CARS Full-Length Practice Test T6**

Day 51 – Review T6

Day 52 – **T7 – Testing Solutions CARS Full-Length Practice Test T7**

Day 53 – Review T7

Day 54 – **T8 – Testing Solutions CARS Full-Length Practice Test T8**

Day 55 – Review T8

Day 56 **–** **Break - Don't do any passages today.*

Week IX:

Day 57 – (**9**) **Passages from AAMC CARS Question Pack** *(90 Minutes)*

Day 58 – Review CARS Practice Test Question Pack

Day 59 – (**9**) **Passages from AAMC CARS Question Pack** *(90 Minutes)*

Day 60 – Review CARS Practice Test Question Pack

Day 61 – (**9**) **Passages from AAMC CARS Question Pack** *(90 Minutes)*

Day 62 – Review CARS Practice Test Question Pack
Day 63 – *Break - Don't do any passages today.*

Week X:

Day 64 – (**9**) **Passages from AAMC CARS Question Pack** *(90 Minutes)*
Day 65 – Review CARS Practice Test Question Pack
Day 66 – **Exam Krackers Full-Length MCAT 1**
Day 67 – Review Exam Krackers Full-Length MCAT 1
Day 68 – **Exam Krackers Full-Length MCAT 2**
Day 69 – Review Exam Krackers Full-Length MCAT 2
Day 70 – *Break - Do (2) Passage from AAMC CARS Question Pack*

Week XI:

Day 71 – **AAMC Official MCAT Sample Test**
Day 72 – Review AAMC Official MCAT Sample Test
Day 73 – *****Break – Don't do any passages today.**
Day 74 – **Exam Krackers Full-Length MCAT 3**
Day 75 – Review Exam Krackers Full-Length MCAT 3
Day 76 – *Break - Do (2) Passage from AAMC CARS Question Pack*
Day 77 – **AAMC Official MCAT Practice Exam (Scored) 1**

Week XII:

Day 78 – *AAMC Official MCAT Practice Exam (Scored) 1*
Day 79 – *Break - Do (2) Passage from AAMC CARS Question Pack*
Day 80 – **Exam Krackers Full-Length MCAT 4**
Day 81 – Review Exam Krackers Full-Length MCAT 4
Day 82 – *Break - Do (2) Passage from AAMC CARS Question Pack*
Day 83 – **AAMC Official MCAT Practice Exam (Scored) 2**
Day 84 – *AAMC Official MCAT Practice Exam (Scored) 2*

Week XIII:

Day 85 – *Break – Don't do any passages today.*
Day 86 – **Exam Krackers Full-Length MCAT 5**
Day 87 – Review Exam Krackers Full-Length MCAT 5
Day 88 – **(5) CARS Passages from AAMC Study Guide**
Day 89 – *Break – Don't do any passages today.*
Day 90 – Test Day

A Comprehensive Review of All CARS Practice Materials Available:

One of the first tasks that overwhelm MCATers is deciding which practice materials to use. In an ideal world, you'd take every CARS practice passage ever written, but few have the time, and let's be honest, most of us want to have some sort of life outside of the premed bubble. The first thing to realize is that "All CARS practice materials were not created equally." Some are better than others and some are much better. If you've got limited money and time to spend, it's critical you pick the best materials to invest in.

I'm going to review all of the potential CARS practice resources one could possibly think to use. If it's not on this list, I don't consider it to be worth your time. Just because it is on this list, doesn't mean that it's great, it just means it's reasonable. These reviews are based on my own experiences with the material, so take the reviews with a grain of salt and realize that I have my own bias as does everyone. With that said, I've personally used almost all of these materials and if I haven't, my students have, so I do depth of experience to draw from. I'm not just making things up about the materials. Honestly, some of them are good, a few of them are great, but most of them aren't worth your time.I will do my best to be impartial and will include links to independent reviews whenever possible. This is a Testing Solutions guide, so please keep that in mind in the brief discussion of our materials.

1) AAMC CARS Practice

There are currently three resources the AAMC offers for MCAT CARS prep. These are hands down the absolute best materials to practice with. Don't even think about taking the MCAT without completing all of them and reviewing their passages heavily! I'd recommend buying the entire AAMC resource package for a 20% discount. It includes all 11 of the current MCAT products. Buy it directly from the AAMC by clicking here!

 A) **The Official Guide to the MCAT Exam (4th Edition)**

 Includes 5 passages and 30 questions, as well as detailed answer explanations
 Hard Copy of Book: $35
 Online Access to Questions: $10

 B) **Official MCAT2015 Sample Test**

 This is a sample test that includes a total of 230 questions surveying the content of the entire MCAT.
 Cost: $25

C) **AAMC MCAT Practice Exam (Scored) 1, 2 & 3**

With these three practice exams, you will receive three actual scaled CARS section scores (118 to 132). Each test includes 9 passages and 53 CARS questions in addition to the other three sections of the MCAT for a total of 27 CARS passages and 159 CARS questions. Cost: $105

D) **Official CARS Question Pack 1 & 2**

Each question pack includes 20 passages and 120 questions, for a total of 40 passages and 240 questions. Most of these passages have been reused from the Verbal Self-Assessment Package the AAMC offered for the old MCAT Cost: $15 a piece

Do not take the MCAT without having used these practice materials!!

2) Testing Solutions MCAT CARS Practice Tests

I'm not going to say much about our practice tests, because I don't want this guide to become an infomercial for our products, but I will say that our practice tests currently have over 525+ reviews on Amazon.com with an average rating of 4.5 stars.

Our practice tests are the highest rated and most frequently rated CARS practice materials available on Amazon. We have (16) practice tests available (T1-T16) which comes out to 144 CARS Practice Passages.

3) The Princeton Review

A) **The Princeton Review Hyperlearning MCAT Verbal Workbook (New & Old)**

Pre-2015 TPRH MCAT Verbal Workbook

Note that this is a course compendium, thus you'd have to take the course to get this book or buy it online from someone who did. I'm going to review the old verbal workbook, as I haven't had a chance to see the new 2015 CARS book yet. I'll update this review once I do. This is really a pretty good book, with a number of very good passages. There are a number of questions which are very unlike the MCAT, in the sense that they are "gotcha" questions, but overall, the passages are very similar. Consensus is that the passages are more complicated, but the questions are easier. I would agree with this assessment. My percentage correct increased a lot (overnight) when I moved on to this resource (I did EK101 first), so in this sense I might say that this resource is easier, but I think EK101 is harder because many of the questions are just really bad questions, thus bringing down your percentage correct.

I went through and counted the natural science passages and subtracted them from the 71 passage total, thus **leaving 53 useable passages**. This book can be very expensive if you're not careful. I've seen it go for $75+, but if you time it right, you can get a copy for around $30 to $40 *so that will cost you roughly 70 cents per passage.*

TPRH doesn't have many reviews on Amazon.com, because the book isn't sold directly to market, but is made only available to students of TPR's MCAT prep courses. You can find copies pretty easily, but be sure you get one that isn't marked up!

Here's a five-star reviewer on Amazon.com, "Only glowing reviews for the CARS Workbook! Great resource for preparing for the MCAT. I've talked to a lot of people about the best method of studying for the test and the answer is always "Passages. Timed." This was an expensive workbook, but it's definitely worth it."

There's been a lot of talk about TPRH Verbal Workbook on Student Doctor Network, so just do a search, but one of the best write-ups can be seen in SD2ed's Guide to the MCAT in 3 Months (Note that this guide was for the old MCAT). Besides the AAMC practice materials and Testing Solutions' practice tests, TPRH Verbal is your best bet.

You can get a used copy on Amazon.com here, or the Student Doctor Network For Sale Thread

TPRH 2015 MCAT Verbal Workbook

I haven't been able to secure a copy of the new book, but by every report I've read, TPRH simply removed the natural science passages from their old books. The new book has 22 stand alone passages and 4 full-length CARS sections putting the total number of passages at 58, which is suspiciously close to my count of 53 usable passages in the old book. You're going to pay top-dollar to get a new copy of this book for this testing cycle, so I'd recommend taking a look at previous years copies which you'll be able to get on the cheap.

B) MCAT Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills Review

The real value of this book is the number of practice passages it makes available to you. I would ignore any advice TPR gives about how to actually take the CARS, as they are a close second behind Kaplan in terms of junk strategies. **For $24.44 you get access to 3 full-length MCAT Exams** (not CARS section tests, but exams). This is an incredible value, but unfortunately, I've heard mixed reviews in terms of how accurate their TPR's full-lengths are, so be weary. The book also comes with a set of passages and questions online for free, so keep that in mind.

4) Exam Krackers Verbal Reasoning Materials:

Generally speaking, Exam Krackers puts out some really good material at a reasonable price, not a great price, but a reasonable one. Overall, their quality is very good, but it does seem that they let proofing errors slip through, as well as problems with answer keys (so always check your answers with the explanations, not just the answer key. I probably had 10 or 12 typo errors where I got questions right (according to the answer explanations) but that the answer key told me were wrong.) They currently have four products out that contain CARS material.

A) Exam Krackers 101 Passages in Verbal Reasoning

This is one of the most commonly recommend Verbal/CARS prep books out there. I thought the early practice tests were quite good. The passages aren't always exactly of the type the AAMC uses for the MCAT, but they are close enough, especially for rough practice. I think the passages helped me by giving me material to use to get my timing down. While I thought the first 9 or 10 practice tests were of good quality, I thought the quality really trailed off towards the end of the book, with a number of errors in the answer keys and solutions guide. I almost didn't finish the book, because I felt like the logic behind the answer choices was so flawed and unhelpful that it almost seemed counter-productive to continue investing time, so keep an eye on the practice tests numbered 11 and above. I would rate 2/3 of the book at a four-star rating, but the last 1/3 a two-star rating.

I went through and counted up the number of passages that would fall under the current Humanities/ Social Sciences CARS framework and I came up with the **number of 76 passages which remain useful**. Overall, EK101 has a pretty good reputation as being a lot of practice for not a ton of money. A used copy with shipping will run you roughly *$30, so that's about 40 cents per passage.*

has 142 reviews on Amazon.com with an average rating of 3.9 stars, it has 56% five-star and 15% one and two-star ratings

A five-star reviewer on Amazon.com wrote, "This book let me really think what are the possible types of questions on the MCAT. I scored highest among all other scores on my Verbal Reasoning. This book really gives you lots of practice before the actual exam."

While a one-star reviewer wrote, "The passages are varied and interesting. Attempting to learn anything from the passages, however, is a waste of time. The answers found in the back of the book are arbitrary with justification and reasoning so terrible, contrived, and sometimes utterly wrong, it's just unforgivable. Save yourself the frustration and buy a different verbal review book."

There's a lot of stuff on EK101 on the Student Doctor Network. I've included two threads in order to give you a taste of what's out there, but a quick search of the forum will give you enough to read for an entire afternoon.

EK 101 vs TPRH Verbal Scores
Serious Doubts about EK Verbal 101

B) **Exam Krackers MCAT Reasoning Skills: Verbal, Research, and Math (9th Edition)**

Besides recommending the strategies I outline in this series, and in all honesty, I really think these strategies are all you need to get a 129+ on the CARS, Exam Krackers MCAT CARS Guide is a very good resource. This book also includes great tips on math shortcuts as well as research, so I do recommend picking it up if these are areas you feel like you could use some extra help on. This book contains (5) 30-Minute CARS Practice Sets with 3 passages each, so that is a total of 15 passages with 90 questions. You can pick the book up on Amazon.com for $24.00, so if you're only buying it for the passages, it's kind of a pricey option ($1.60 per passage), but if you're also interested in the other parts of the book too, this might be a good resources.

C) **Exam Krackers Full-Length Practice Tests**

Exam Krackers currently offers (5) full-length practice tests for *$50 a piece*. While this is kind of pricey, there really aren't a lot of options out there currently for practice tests, and it is reasonably good practice. Consensus on what I've read is that these tests are harder than the real thing and AAMC's released sample test. There's a lengthy thread here on SDN that discusses this in detail, so if you're thinking about picking these up, take a look here.

D) Exam Krackers 16 Mini-MCATs

While I can't recommend this book for the majority of its content, as the MCAT has changed and much of the science content is out of date, this book can be purchased for incredibly cheap on amazon (something like $4 or $5 with shipping). I thought the passages were very similar to what you get in the EK101 book, and most of the reviews I've read agree. It really hasn't gotten much play here on SDN, although here is a decent thread reviewing the book.

The book has 16 "Mini-MCATS" each with 2 verbal passages each, so the book includes 32 verbal passages. By my count, 27 of the passages are still useable for the CARS, so this is actually one of your cheapest ways of picking up verbal passages, *at a cost of 19 cents per passage*. If you're thinking of going with EK, this is a cheap way of getting a number of passages for almost no money.

5) The Berkeley Review Verbal Reasoning

Berkeley Review's Guide to MCAT Verbal

After removing the natural science passages, this book has 69 usable passages. I think overall, TBR is a great company, in fact probably the best MCAT prep-company out there. Their science passages are second to none. With that said, I think their verbal passages were not as strong. They were good, but I would rate them behind TPR and EK. I did a number of practice tests worth of their passages but found some of their questions to be too detail focused and that they didn't correspond all that well to the CARS. I think they'd be useful if you are doing a long-term study plan where you'll be doing passages 6 months out from test day. Otherwise, with resources 1 to 4 above, you'll have more than enough. Also, the book costs $70 dollars new, so you'll be paying roughly $1 per passage.

6) Other Stuff:

There are a few other companies out there that offer practice materials, but for a variety of reasons, I can't recommend them. Some because they're just too new, and some because their materials are awful. I include them below to be fair and to offer you the opportunity to do your own research.

Next Step

One of the newer companies out there is Next Step. I've heard mixed reviews here on SDN (this is a thread about possible plagiarism), but many people seem pretty happy with their materials, and their head guy, Brian, has posted a lot of great material here on SDN. I'm going to buy their books and go through them myself, so I'll probably offer a review of them in the near future. They have two books available on Amazon as well as (5) Full-Length Practice Tests available. I've provided links to each below.

MCAT Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills: Strategy and Practice: Timed Practice for the New MCAT Verbal Section - $32.81

MCAT Verbal Practice: 108 Passages for the New CARS Section - $26.95

Next Step Full-Length Practice Tests - $99 for (3) or $149 for (5)

Here's a lengthy post on SDN about their CARS books.

As far as Kaplan goes, I would strongly urge you not to listen to anything they say about the CARS section. Their practice materials are nothing more than glorified word-searches. They aren't worth your time, except to use them for the MCAT sprint exercise I describe in the advanced techniques section. I know they have a lot of material, but remember, quantity isn't everything. Quality is critical if you want to develop the correct CARS intuition about timing and wrong and right answer choices. If you're studying 6+ months out from your test date, it's fine to do the Kaplan practice tests, but within that 6 month window, I'd recommend using the resources outlined in 1 through 4 and maybe 5 first, depending on the amount of time/ money you have.

Gold Standard, McGraw-Hill, or Sterling MCAT

I can't recommend these practice materials. I've never heard of anyone who has shelled out the cash for these products and been happy with what they got. Gold Standard's science material isn't all that bad, but their CARS/ Verbal is basically just cut and paste Wikipedia articles of what I've seen of their tests and what I've read in terms of reviews. I wouldn't recommend using any of them.

Day 1 – The Plan/ Getting Your Materials

Depending on your goals, doing well on the MCAT CARS section isn't as difficult as many premeds fear. As you know, the passages you get can range from variations on Athenian democracy to literary criticism of Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass. This terrifies most premeds as their experience with the humanities, and the social sciences have often been limited at best. The truth about the MCAT CARS section, though, is that familiarity with the humanities and social sciences have nothing to do with the score you'll ultimately get. I've seen the dorkiest science nerd (the push sagging glasses up their nose with middle finger and compress albuterol inhaler types) do incredibly well on the verbal section of the MCAT. (There is almost no difference between the old verbal section and the new CARS section save the elimination of natural sciences passages, the number of questions and timing on the test. We'll go into that on Day 2.)

The number one key to doing well on the MCAT CARS section is timing.

So this is what we'll be focusing on first. Once you get comfortable with the correct pace for taking the MCAT CARS section, we'll move on to more sexy strategies for doing well, but if your timing is off, none of the rest matters. Nine out of ten students who I've worked with that struggle on the CARS section, struggle because their timing sucks. They so want to do well that they spend far too much time early on in the test and then have to rush for the last third. It is impossible to do well on the CARS section if you are rushing the last third of the test. Timing is our first step to success.

You have never taken a test like the MCAT CARS section before. It is nothing like a philosophy midterm or a sociology blue book test. It is the most artificial critical reading assessment the world has ever seen. It has nine passages of disparate topics with fifty-three total questions that you must complete in ninety minutes. No one is good at this at the beginning because no one has to do this in their regular life. You might be thinking: No!!! I'm doomed!! Rather the opposite. It is such an artificial skill, such a unique set of skills that are being tested that it is actually relatively easy to prepare for if you give yourself enough time and go about it in the right way. The MCAT CARS section does not cause students trouble because it is difficult. It causes students so much trouble because it is unfamiliar. The best way to get over this is to do a ton (and I mean a ton) of timed practice passages. So, if you are sixty to ninety days out from your test date, here's what I recommend you do:

1) Buy one or two of the old MCAT Verbal Reasoning Workbooks out there. I'd recommend *Exam Krackers 101 Passages in MCAT Verbal Reasoning* and/or *The Princeton Review's Hyperlearning Verbal Workbook*. I have no affiliation with either of these companies; I'm only recommending them because I've done every passage and question in each of these books and they do a reasonable job at mimicking the MCAT. They aren't perfect and have their flaws, but they are good. You won't want to waste your very best passages during these early stages, so burn through some older materials you can pick up for cheap. (*Make sure you skip any natural science passages as those won't be on the new MCAT.*)

2) For the next week, do **one passage a day.** Just one, but make sure you take it under timed conditions. Don't worry about reviewing the passage for now. Feel free to skim the answer explanations and spend some time looking at the questions you get wrong, but don't invest a lot of time for now. For the next week, we'll be focusing on timing and nothing else.

Use the following time table below to figure out how much time to give yourself.

Each CARS Passage will have either 5, 6 or 7 questions attached. Give yourself the following amount of time for the respective number of questions per passage. Note that this exercise is meant to develop within you the correct CARS pacing. Come test day, you won't be worrying about how many questions a particular passage has, but just like a high-performance athlete, sometimes you have to train before you can perform. On Day 25, we'll discuss how to actually take a full-length test. You won't be wasting time figuring how much time to spend on a passage on test day. Just for now, you're building your capacity to feel when it's time to move on from one question to the next. If you simply give yourself 10 minutes per passage, you're intuition on 5 question passages will be to spend too much time, while on the 7 question passages, your intuition will be to rush through. Use the following timing strategies below for now.

For a passage with 5 questions | 9 Minutes
For a passage with 6 questions | 10.5 Minutes
For a passage with 7 questions | 12 Minutes

We'll work on honing our pacing as this guide progresses, but this is a good place to begin. Do your passage for today, and come back tomorrow for more. The key to doing well on the MCAT CARS section is to do a little bit each day. I promise the snowball effect will give you the results you want if you work hard and leave nothing on the table.

You can do this. See you tomorrow!

Today's Assignment: Do One CARS Passage Under Timed Conditions - Click Here to Take Our Day 1 Passage - Population Health

TIP: For those of you who will be going through this guide on a daily basis, it can be time-consuming to find the correct day's post due to all the questions. We've created a "Table of Contents" PDF which has links to each post. You can use the PDF to jump directly to the post you're on. Download your "Table of Contents" here!

Day 2 – Breaking Down the MCAT CARS Section

What Happened to Verbal Reasoning?:

Of all the major changes the MCAT has undergone in this new rollout, the MCAT CARS section is the least affected. It is very similar to the old MCAT's Verbal Reasoning section, in fact, early reports of the released practice materials by the AAMC indicate many of the practice verbal passages made the trip over to the new MCAT. With that said, there are some significant changes. Let's take a look:

1) 9 Passages
   Passages either have 5, 6 or 7 questions
2) 53 Questions
3) 90 Minutes
4) Passages are of two types – Social Sciences and Humanities
   Social Science Topics
      - Anthropology
      - Archeology
      - Economics
      - Education
      - Geography
      - History
      - Linguistics
      - Political Science
      - Population Health
      - Psychology
      - Sociology
      - Studies of Diverse Cultures
   Humanities Topics
      - Architecture
      - Art
      - Dance
      - Ethics
      - Literature
      - Music
      - Philosophy
      - Popular
      - Culture
      - Religion
      - Theater
      - Studies of Diverse Cultures

Are you someone who likes to dork out on details? I've included a few links from the AAMC so you can dig more into the niceties of the CARS section, just in case that's your jam.

AAMC MCAT CARS Content Overview

AAMC MCAT Essentials PDF

Don't forget to do your passage for today, and thanks for reading! See you tomorrow!

Today's Assignment: Do One CARS Passage Under Timed Conditions - Click Here to Take Our Day 2 Passage - Ethics

TIP: For those of you who will be going through this guide on a daily basis, it can be time-consuming to find the correct day's post due to all the questions. We've created a "Table of Contents" PDF which has links to each post. You can use the PDF to jump directly to the post you're on. Download your "Table of Contents" here!

> *"Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts."*
> – Winston Churchill

Day 3 – Reviewing/ Timing

Timing:

Ok, hopefully, your burn through material is in the mail, and you did your one passage yesterday. If you didn't, today's a new day to get a new start. Remember to take every passage under timed conditions. Our goal early on is to build your intuition about the correct pacing for the CARS section. This is why it is so important to do your passages timed and especially in the early stages, to do them within the time intervals I laid out on Day 1. If you're getting through a 7 question passage in significantly less time than 12 minutes, try and slow down a little bit to make sure you're not missing anything and if you're taking much longer than 9 minutes on a 5 question passage, try speeding up some and letting go of the harder questions in the passage sooner. As we proceed through these first 30 days, I'll outline a more nuanced timing strategy where you aren't so worried about the number of questions and minutes, but for now, you're training and getting comfortable. Keep up the hard work. As with all new things, it's new and uncomfortable at first.

Remember:

1) For the first week, do **one passage a day**, no matter what!
2) Use the following time intervals for the CARS section.
    a. For a passage with 5 questions | 9 Minutes
    b. For a passage with 6 questions | 10.5 Minutes
    c. For a passage with 7 questions | 12 Minutes

Reviewing/ (Timing again!):

So now on to some new material for today. One of the major misconceptions most premeds have about studying for the CARS section is the emphasis they put on reviewing passages and questions. To get an ultra-high score, you are going to have to review your tests in great detail. For those looking to score in the 90%+ range, you'll need to be able to identify question types, wrong answer pathologies, and parse the author's arguments into their components. These are all critical skills for top tier success, but they are not foundational skills. I cannot count the number of students I've taught and tutored who would spend hours trying to master these advanced strategies reviewing their practice tests in great detail but yet were still consistently rushing the last third of the test, basically sprinting through the last three passages and question sets. Studying the advanced strategies first is like trying to run a marathon before you can walk. It just doesn't work. I'm going to say something controversial, but it is the _critical first step to getting any score you want on the MCAT CARS section_, whether you're shooting for an average, above average, or ultra- high (ivy league) score.

Until you're able to consistently finish your CARS practice tests on time without rushing through any passages, you shouldn't be reviewing your practice tests. Instead, you should be taking more practice tests.

I know this is heresy for some, but if my teaching and tutoring experiences have taught me anything it is this: Most students have the ability on day one to score well on the CARS section if they are able to master their pacing. This means a few things:

Don't _waste_ time reviewing your practice tests until:

- You are consistently finishing your passages without rushing

- You are able to consistently finish your passages without staring at the clock to regulate whether you should speed up or slow down. (_We are trying to build your CARS pacing intuition, which does not mean staring at the clock all the time_).

- You are able to consistently let go of hard questions without getting snagged on them and wasting precious time.

This is the single easiest change that MCATers can make!

1) The first time you think to yourself, "I'm spending a lot of time on this question" look at the clock and give yourself 30 more seconds.

2) Eliminate any answer choices you can.

3) After 30 seconds, guess, mark the question for review later, and tell yourself "I'll come back to this later once I get the easy ones."

4) If you do this, _you will have time at the end of the test to come back_, and more often than not, giving yourself a little time to clear your head, you'll see the question anew and what you were missing the first time.

Once you master your pacing, then it's time to move on to the advanced techniques we'll explore later in our 30-day learning phase. For those of you seething at the mouth right now, we will go over my detailed approach to reviewing CARS passages, questions, and answer types which will allow you to develop your advanced techniques, but you've got to master the basics first. Until then, keep doing your daily passage and focus on not getting snagged on the hard questions.

Just because it's so important, I'll say it again, **practice letting go of the hard questions**. Getting your timing down is the easiest way to make huge improvements on the CARS section. You're already smart enough to do well on the CARS right now. It's just that you're not used to the correct pacing yet, and you aren't in the habit of letting go of the difficult questions that most test takers get wrong anyways.

Remember: The question that will keep you out of your top medical school is not the one you get wrong, but the one you spend too much time on.

Today's Assignment: Do One CARS Passage Under Timed Conditions - Click Here to Take Our Day 3 Passage - Psychology

TIP: For those of you who will be going through this guide on a daily basis, it can be time-consuming to find the correct day's post due to all the questions. We've created a "Table of Contents" PDF which has links to each post. You can use the PDF to jump directly to the post you're on. Download your "Table of Contents" here!

"You've done it before and you can do it now. See the positive possibilities. Redirect the substantial energy of your frustration and turn it into positive, effective, unstoppable determination."
– Ralph Martson

Day 4 –MCAT CARS Myths: The "Don'ts"

Today, is the "Crappy, Cheap Ideas Mega Prep Companies Try to Sell You" edition of our 90 days to MCAT CARS Success. I'm going to go through some of the myths and do my best to dispel them for you.

The Myths:

"Read the New York Times, Economist, and Humanities journals to bone up on your critical reading skills. One or two articles a day for three months."

WRONG: If your goal is to become a well-informed, engaged citizen, then by all means go for it, but if you think this will help you one iota on the MCAT CARS section, I've got a bridge I'd like to sell you. The MCAT CARS section is an incredibly artificial environment. They give you 9 passages that could range from Sociology to Ancient Greek Philosophy. You have a very short amount of time to read the passage and answer the questions. This is not a leisurely stroll through the park on a Sunday afternoon. The only way you are going to get better at the MCAT CARS is by doing MCAT CARS passages. There are no secrets, that's the truth. The students I've taught who have done the very best on the CARS are the ones who have done between 20 and 30 *CARS practice tests.* They are using the best materials and investing a great deal of time in taking a ton of passages. They are reading and doing every passage available to them because this is the only way to get better. Reading a publication like the above mentioned just isn't going to help.

"I'm a humanities major. I don't need to practice for the CARS."

WRONG: Good luck with that. I majored in philosophy in undergrad, had three humanities minors and am currently finishing up a master's degree at Harvard University in the study of religion. I know how to read, and I'm just about as familiar with the humanities as one could get. But my first scores were just above average (of the average test taker, not matriculate!). Having familiarity with the humanities might be a psychological comfort, but it does not translate into better scores on the CARS. *You have to practice the CARS to do well on the CARS.* How did I get my score up to the highest tier? Honestly, I took around 50 verbal practice tests in the months leading up to my test. I did every passage I could get my hands on. Now, I wanted to score at a particular level, so I'm not saying that every person needs to do that many passages to do well. What I am saying is that no one is born a CARS expert. It only comes about by doing a ton of passages.

"Skip the hard passages and come back to them later."

WRONG: This is absolutely the worst advice out there. You cannot score 127+ with this strategy. I have never heard of it being done. To score a 127+, you will have to do every passage and get the majority of the questions right. Skipping around and avoiding the so-called hard passages won't get you there. Furthermore, even if it did, I've never met anyone who could in 15 seconds tell me if a passage was going to be "hard" or not. On top of that, how often have you struggled through a passage just to find that the questions were easy? You just can't tell on the CARS. So if you want to do well on the CARS, do every passage in order. Don't waste your time or mental energy trying to figure out if you should do the passage now or later. Do every passage and do them in order.

"I'm struggling with time; I need to learn to speed read."

WRONG: No you don't. Your problem doesn't have to do with your reading speed; it has to do with the way you're approaching answering the questions and the amount of time you're spending going back to the passage looking for answers. We'll cover how true this is in more detail tomorrow on Day 5. You could read at HALF the reading speed of the average adult and still have over a minute per question. Your problem isn't your reading speed. It's your pacing. Once you get that under control, your time problems will disappear. Speed reading isn't your solution.

"Write out a passage map, take notes, or highlight extensively while reading the passages."

WRONG: Besides highlighting the name of a person or school of thought in order to locate it easily later, there is absolutely no need to be taking notes, writing out a passage map, or highlighting when you're reading the passages. These are a waste of time...a major waste of time. They slow down your pace, and they take your focus off engaging critically with the material. You should be asking yourself, why is the author saying this? Where is she going? How could the MCAT ask a question about this? You should not be trying to summarize the entire paragraph in 5 words. It's a waste of time. Don't do it. Later in our series, once you've got the keyword review down, I'll show you a summarizing technique to use when reviewing to train yourself to do this instinctively. We'll get there, don't worry, but as to taking notes. Don't do it!

"Read the questions before reading the passage."

WRONG: Awful, awful advice. The human mind can only keep 7 things in its short term memory at once. I have yet to meet anyone, and I mean anyone, in all my years of MCAT teaching and tutoring, who was able to tell me anything about the 5 or 6 questions she had just finished reading three sentences into the passage. Sometimes, students are resistant to me on this point, because they've read that someone somewhere said this trick worked for them and that because of it, their score jumped 8 points. If you don't believe me, just give it a try. Read the five questions first, then read the first paragraph of the passage, and then try and write down what you can remember about the questions. I'll bet you the cost of this guide that you remember next to nothing. If there's one thing I would like to convince you of it is that you shouldn't waste your time on gimmicks.

"I need to read through this or that prep book on the CARS section."

WRONG: No you don't. I didn't read a single CARS prep book. I *did* take an unbelievable number of practice tests under timed conditions. Since I started Testing Solutions, I've read through pretty much every book out there on the CARS, and I'm stunned by the sheer waste of time and stupidity out there. You don't need to read this crap. I've got the glossy cover of one of the mega test prep companies in front of me right now. Some entries in the Table of Contents include: Rhetorical Analysis, Domains of Discourse, The Logic of Conditionals, Analogical reasoning...and the list goes on. The CARS section is not a hard test. You don't need a Ph.D. in logic to do well on it. The reason most students struggle is because their timing is off and they're not used to thinking in the ways the CARS section requires. The quickest, most efficient way to get your timing down and to start thinking in the way that will get you points on test day is to do a ton of practice passages. Use the tips in this guide, and leave the CARS prep books at the bookstores.

"I need to take an expensive prep course to do well on the CARS section. Without those special strategies, I'm not going to make it."

WRONG: I cannot stand the predatory pricing of the mega prep companies' materials. First of all, everyone knows that it's all junk, but because, there is so much riding on doing well on the CARS and the MCAT in general, they ask you "Is there a price too high for achieving your dream?" I can promise you that you can do well on the MCAT if you work hard and are determined. I did not use a prep course and I scored in the 99 percentile. I am not that smart; I just work incredibly hard. You can too. If you employ all of the tips and strategies I outline in this guide AND if you do more practice passages than three or four normal MCATers put together. If you do, you will do well on the CARS. You just have to do the work. Giving someone a lot of money just isn't going to get the job done. For better or worse, work is the only way.

Keep going! Before you know it, you're pacing will become second nature. See you tomorrow!

Today's Assignment: Do One CARS Passage Under Timed Conditions - Click Here to Take Our Day 4 Passage - Philosophy

"I've failed over and over again in my life, and that is why I succeed."
– Michael Jordan

Day 5 – How to Approach the MCAT CARS Section – The Passage

Have you done your passage today? Do it! In two short days, we'll be starting two-a-days, so enjoy the break while it lasts!

The Passage

Today, we're going to start a mini-series on how to best read for the MCAT CARS section. This is one of the most important topics that we'll cover in this entire series. Besides mastering the right pace, how a student approaches reading the passages is the most critical skill to develop. There is so much crap out there about how to approach the CARS section that students are left drowning in a sea of fecal matter. As you learned yesterday in the, "Do's and Don'ts" of MCAT CARS there is a lot of junk out there, so your best bet is to see if you can find the courage to let go of your preconceived notions about the CARS section and start with a clean slate. I promise you that I have seen the approach I'm about to explain to you work for hundreds of students. It is simple and easy to do. It's not fancy or complicated. It's got five steps, and if you do these repeatedly, they'll become old hat within the week. But before I go into the Testing Solutions' approach to reading CARS passages, I want to say one more thing about timing.

"**The reason you are having trouble finishing the CARS section has nothing to do with your reading speed or how long you're taking to read the passages.**"

The time crunch almost every MCATer faces early on when starting to practice for the CARS has *nothing to do with reading passages*. NOTHING! Let me explain:

There are 9 passages on the CARS section. Each passage is a maximum of 600 words. Thus,

9 X 600 words = 5,400 words

Now, the average reading speed for an adult is 300 words per minute. Thus,

5,400 words / 300 words per minute = 18 minutes

Just in case that hasn't sunk in, I'll say it again, it would take the average adult just 18 minutes to read all 9 of the passages on the CARS section. Even if you read at half the rate of an average adult (150 words per minute), you'd still have 54 minutes remaining to answer the 53 questions. If you're having trouble finishing on time, it isn't because of how you're reading the passage. I'll go into how to fix this problem below. Let's take a look at the steps to passage reading success.

The Testing Solutions' Approach to Reading CARS Passages:

Step 1: Stop before every passage (including the first one!), close your eyes, and take three deep, slow breaths. Count inside your head (oneeeeee) on the inhale through your nose, and then slowly exhale through your mouth. Repeat and count twoooooo. And finally, repeat for threeee. Notice any sensations in your chest, stomach, or mouth as you breathe. Try to watch your breath. I know you might be rolling your eyes, but this clears your mental ram and allows you to let go of the previous passage or the stress of starting a new section. Don't be the person who springs into the first passage and "reads" the first passage without realizing what's going on. You'll have to start over, and you'll be beating yourself up for the rest of the test for the wasted time. **Take three deep, slow breaths before every passage (including the first one!).**

Step 2: Do the passages in order. Don't skip around. Some companies out there recommend a "Now or Later" approach where in your preview, you decide if you're going to do the passage now or come back later. If you want to score in the 127 to 129 range (a competitive CARS score) you are going to have to do well on every passage. Don't waste time trying to figure out whether it's going to be an easy or hard passage for you. Often, CARS passages which are difficult to read have easy questions and easy passages have difficult questions. It is impossible to determine in 10 to 15 seconds whether you're going to have a hard time with a passage or not. Buckle down and do the passages in order, one right after another. **Do the passages in order.**

Step 3: Take 10 to 15 seconds and preview the passage. Your only goal is to realize the topic of the passage. Is it a history passage? Or one about philosophy? Where's it going? What's it about in the most general of terms? I'd recommend reading the first sentence of every paragraph. So often, CARS passages start off seeming like they're about one thing when two paragraphs down you realize they're about something completely different. The surprise can be jarring and cause a loss of retention. **Take 10 to 15 seconds to preview the passage!**

Step 4: Read the passage slowly and thoroughly. <u>DON'T SKIM!</u> You need to understand what you're reading, even if you have to spend a little extra time. On the other hand, don't try to master every detail as 80% of what you read in the passage will not be referenced by the questions. As you read the passage, read for structure, not detail. The details will be there if you need them. As you read the passage, ask yourself continually these three questions:

1) Why did the author write this?
2) Where is the author likely to go?
3) Which kinds of questions might I expect?

Read actively. Engage with the material. Lie to yourself and tell yourself this passage is the most interesting thing you've ever read. Formulate the "Why" of "Why did the author take the time to write this." Above all, **Read the passage slowly and thoroughly, and DON'T SKIM, EVER!**

Step 5: If you are not finishing with time to spare on your CARS practice tests (i.e. you haven't mastered the CARS pacing yet), you cannot, and I repeat cannot go back to the passage after you finish reading it. Read through the passage once, slowly and thoroughly, and then you're done with looking at the passage. Move on and answer the questions. The reason students have so much time trouble on the CARS section is because they spend three or four times the amount of time they should going back to the passage trying to look up the answers. We'll go over when and how to go back to the passage later, but know that the MCAT rarely asks hunt and find questions. They want you to be able to grasp the gist of the passage, not word search answers. Once your timing is under control and you're regularly finishing, then you can start to go back to the passage sparingly, but not until then. **If you're not finishing the CARS section with time to spare, don't go back to the passage when answering questions until you've answered them all. Then go back to the ones you marked if you have time at the end.**

A Short Review:

In shorter form:

Step 1: Take three deep, slow breaths before every passage (including the first one!)
Step 2: Do the passages in order.
Step 3: Take 10 to 15 seconds to preview the passage.
Step 4: Read the passage slowly and thoroughly. Don't SKIM!
Step 5: If you haven't mastered your pacing yet, don't go back to the passage until you've answered all the questions once through!

Great job today! Start integrating these five steps into your daily passages from here on out. We'll continue taking a look at how to approach CARS passages tomorrow. Until then!

Today's Assignment: Do One CARS Passage Under Timed Conditions - Click Here to Take Our Day 5 Passage - Psychology

Day 6 – Passage Types – Argumentative

Ok, today we're going to continue what we started yesterday by turning our attention to the two general categories of passages the MCAT gives you. Today we'll look at argumentative passages and tomorrow we'll take up the second category, descriptive passages.

The Argument:

You'll know when you're reading an argumentative passage if you feel like you're talking to a used car salesperson trying to convince you of something. The author has an agenda and is trying to advance a particular thesis. If you can learn to breakdown the author's arguments into their various parts, you'll pick up a ton of points on the MCAT. Now if you've taken an analytical logic course, what I present here is going to drive you crazy, as there is so much more to argumentation than what I'm going to include, but for the MCAT, this is all you're going to need. If you're able to learn to recognize these various parts, it's going to pay off big time come test day!

The Parts:

There are five major parts to any argument. Not every argument has every part, but most have at least a few. Many of these are already going to be familiar. Well over half of the questions on the CARS section are going to deal directly with one of these five parts, so if you can practice seeing them, you're going to be eating up points like they are candy. Take a look at this diagram as well as the definitions below.
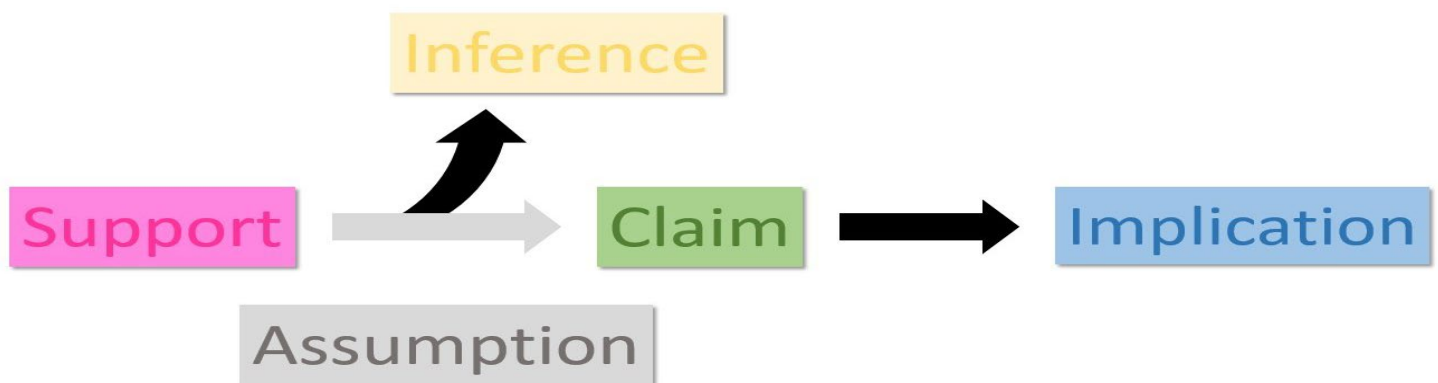
We'll start with the two most basic parts and then build from there.

Claim – The claim is the point the author is trying to make. (E.g *Burritos are better than pizza.*) Claims are almost always stated. They have to be for there to be an argument.

Support – The support is the evidence the author provides to convince you his claim is the case. (E.g. *9 out of 10 people would prefer to eat a burrito over a slice of pizza.)* Support is almost always stated in some form. However, a weak or poor argument may lack support in part or in the whole.

Assumption – The assumption is the connection between the support and the claim. In the example of burritos, the assumption is that there is a correlation between the number of people who eat burritos and whether or not a burrito is better than a slice of pizza. Assumptions are *usually not stated*. If the assumption turns out to be incorrect, then the entire argument falls apart.

Next we'll take a look at the two more nuanced components of an argument. Both of these are unstated and thus more difficult to see. This is the area from which most of the CARS section's most difficult questions come from.

Implication – An implication is a necessary but unstated conclusion of the argument. It has to be true in all cases for it to be an implication. Implications are external applications of the argument to new situations or conditions outside of the argument.(E.g. Since burritos are better than pizza, because more people eat burritos, *we should open a burrito stand instead of a pizza parlor*.)

Inference – Inferences are the most squishy of them all. They require a leap to a necessary and unstated conclusion about the evidence and assumptions of the argument. Inferences are the opposite of implications in that inferences reveal something unstated internal to the argument. (E.g. Mexican food is better than Italian food.) We'll go into another example below to make this clearer, so don't worry if it's still a little fuzzy.

Example Argument:

I'm going to write out a few brief arguments below. Take a moment on your own to identify the different parts of each, and then we'll come back together and work each one out.

1) Bill has a reputation for having excellent taste in movies. Jill is talking to Frank about a new movie that just came out last week "Die MCAT Die: Part II." Jill tells Frank that he should go see the movie because Bill went and saw it.

2) Either you or I have to scrub the tub, and I'm not going to be the one to do it.

3) Billy is a good guy. Billy lent me $20, helped me move and backed me up in a bar fight. Joe also lent me $20, helped me move and backed me up in a bar fight. Carl is a good guy.

Ok, were you able to identify the parts? I've color coded each of the parts present, and we'll go through each one.

1) Bill has a reputation for having excellent taste in movies. Jill is talking to Frank about a new movie that just came out last week "Die MCAT Die: Part II." Jill tells Frank that he should go see the movie because Bill went and saw it.

So if we break this down we get:

Claim – Frank ought to go see "Die MCAT Die: Part II."

Support – Bill went and saw "Die MCAT Die: Part II," and Bill has good taste in movies.

Assumption – What's the assumption? *That if Bill goes and sees a movie, it's likely to be a good movie.*

Implication – Sometimes there are no clear implications for a particular argument, and sometimes there are many. In this case, it's not quite that clear, but one might go something like, "Frank ought to see all the movies Bill goes to see because they are good movies, and Frank likes good movies."

Inference – Again, with inferences, there aren't always clear ones. In this case, a reasonable inference might be that Bill liked "Die MCAT Die: Part II" because if he has good taste in the movies he goes to see, he is also likely to enjoy said movies.

2) Either you or I have to scrub the tub, and I'm not going to be the one to do it.

Claim – In this case, we have a cross between a stated and unstated claim. The claim is that one of us is going to have to scrub the tub.

Support – The explanatory power of the support in this argument is fairly weak, as it's not clear why only you or I can scrub the tub. Why not Tim? Furthermore, it's not clear why I'm not going to do it.

Assumption – What's the assumption? *That I can be taken at my word and if I say I'm not going to do something, I'm actually not going to do it.*

Implication – This argument shows implication at its very best. What is implied by this argument? Well if I'm not going to scrub the tub, and if only you or I can scrub the tub, what's the necessary, unstated conclusion? *You're going to scrub the tub.*

Inference – The inference here is fairly weak, and there are many possibilities, but you might infer from the argument that there are some set of constraints that limit the number of people who can scrub the tub to just you and me. Another inference might be that I don't ever scrub tubs, or that I don't like to scrub tubs.

3) Billy is a good guy. Billy lent me $20, helped me move and backed me up in a bar fight. Joe also lent me $20, helped me move and backed me up in a bar fight. Carl is a good guy.

Claim – The claim is that Billy is a good guy.

Support – The support provided is that Billy lent me $20, helped me move and backed me up in a bar fight.

Assumption – What's the assumption? *That good guys lend people $20, help people move and back people up in bar fights.*

Implication – An implication of the argument is that since Joe also lent me $20, helped me move, and backed me up in a bar fight, that Joe is also a good guy. This is a necessary, but unstated conclusion of the argument. Joe must be a good guy if the argument is to hold.

Inference – Based on the set up of the passage, we can infer that because Carl is a good guy, that Carl must be the kind of person that lends people $20, helps people move, and backs people up in bar fights.

How'd you do? Don't worry if you struggled. It takes time to get an eye for these types of things.

CARS Arguments and Question Stems:

To wrap up today's post, we're going to take a look at a few different question stems and how they relate to the different parts of an argument. There are a ton of different ways for the MCAT to ask these questions, so don't memorize them but instead, seek to get the feel of what the question stem is pointing towards and asking you to identify.

Claim - These are some of the easiest questions on the MCAT if you learn to spot them. In later posts, we're going to look at the various question types and how to attack each of them, but until then, here are a few ways the MCAT might ask you to identify the claim of an argument.

> The *central thrust* of this passage is:

> The *main idea* of the passage is:

> The *author asserts* which of the following concerning those who participated in the American Revolution?

Like I said, we're going to break down questions like these later down the road, but *Main Idea* questions require you to not have too narrow or too broad of a view of the author's central thesis. With these types of questions, you're always asking "What is the author getting at?"

Support - Most often on the MCAT, you'll be asked to identify support the author gives for a particular argument or to evaluate the strengths or weakness of said support. Sometimes, the MCAT will give you new information in a question stem and ask you how it affects the author's argument. Those types of questions require you to identify whether or not the new information affects the support the author gives. Like I said, we'll break this down in more detail later, but until then take a look at a few different ways the MCAT could ask about support given in the passage.

> The *author claims but offers no supporting evidence for which of the following conclusions?*

> Which of the following *underlying reasons* for the methods described in the passage *is the most reasonable?*

> If baby pandas were found not to be cute as was once thought, all other things being equal, *which of the following conclusions in the passage would be challenged?*

> The author's *claim* that donkeys are actually highly evolved miniature horses *is supported by:*

Assumptions - Assumptions are critical components to any argument. If the assumption is weak, the argument is weak. If the assumption is proven to be false, the entire argument is proven to be false. Returning to our three previous arguments, if Bill goes and sees terrible movies all the time, the argument that Frank ought to go see "Die MCAT Die: Part II" because Bill has good taste and went to see "Die MCAT Die: Part II" is severely weakened to the point of breaking. If good guys don't lend $20 to people, help them move, and back people up in bar fights, the entire argument falls apart. Developing the capacity to identify and evaluate assumptions underlying arguments will pay huge dividends come test day.

> *Implicit in the passage is the assumption that* all golfers:

> The fact that some airlines actually factor in wrongful death payouts to passengers' families into their ticket prices would *most directly challenge the assumption that:*

> An *unstated assumption* of the author's discussion concerning the US Navy's action readiness *is that:*

Implication – What must be true about some external case based on the passage? Implications are not stated and yet must necessarily be true if the argument outlined is correct. *Implication* questions are most commonly seen on the MCAT by asking you what the author might think about a related topic or issue based on the arguments he or she makes in the passage. The relations is always one from the argument to something external to the argument. You'll have to keep an eye out to make sure the conditions outlined in the new situation do not change the basic claims and support taken for granted in the argument itself.

What distinction is implied in the passage between parents who send their children to public schools and those who send their children to private ones?

Based on information provided in the passage, which of the following forms of pollution would probably pose the greatest threat to humanity?

Which of the following educational policies would the author of the passage be most likely to agree with?

Inference – With inference questions, you're going to be deducing from the argument some specific internal conclusion of the argument. An inference is an unstated, but necessary conclusion about something internal to the argument's parts. Try to develop an intuitive sense of the strength of your inference. Some inferences are stronger than others. Here's how the MCAT might ask you about inferences:

One can infer from the passage that the underlying goal of Lincoln's Gettysburg address was to:

If the passage information is correct, which of the following inferences is justified by the fact that all Americans love Billy Joel?

It may reasonably be inferred from the passage that most airline pilots ought not do which of the following while flying a jetliner?

Wooh! That was a long one today. If it was too long, take a break and go over this again a little later today. Remember, Rome wasn't built in a day, and many of the skills that you're developing are completely new to you. Keep up with your daily passage and try to keep an eye out for the various parts of the author's argument(s). Tomorrow, we'll finish up arguments and then move on to descriptive passages.

Today's Assignment: Do One CARS Passage Under Timed Conditions - Click Here to Take Our Day 6 Passage - Literature

"I never dreamed about success. I worked for it."
– Estee Lauder

Day 7 – Argumentation: Modality

Yesterday was a lengthy post. I know most students start to sweat a little when it comes to parsing out arguments on the CARS section, but don't worry. You'll get better at it over time. It's just like any skill, you're going to suck at the beginning. You can download a summary PDF of today and yesterday's posts here. I recommend reviewing it once a day for the next week or so, until you feel like you understand what's going on.

Modality:

Today's topic is one of the most important skills you can develop for the MCAT CARS section. It applies to passages, questions, and answer choices alike. If you master this, you're going to do incredibly well on the CARS. If I could give you one magical skill (besides flying) I'd give you this one. I'm talking about identifying the modality of an argument. WTF?!? What is modality? Modality is a blanket term for the *modal qualifiers that show what kind and degree of reliance is to be placed on the conclusions, given the arguments available to support them.** Or said in less snobby terms:

Modality is a measure of the strength of the claim of an argument.

Every argument has a certain modality, which is to say that every argument can be evaluated on a scale in terms of strength or weakness, conditions, and/or limitations. In being able to evaluate the modality of a particular argument, you enter the pantheon of MCAT CARS Gods.

Check these examples out:

A, so in all probability B.

A, so plausibly B.

A, so very likely B.

A, so very certainly B.

Without the extra words, it's easy to see the modality of the argument. In the first, the strength of the argument is middle of the road or leaning slightly to the affirmative. With the second, somewhat less so. With the third, this is absolutely a strong claim, and with the final example, we have a very strong claim indeed. Let's throw some words in there.

Michael <u>never</u> brushes his teeth.

Carl <u>sometimes</u> jumps rope when nervous.

Cindy <u>always</u> refuses to kiss anyone named Ted.

The modal qualifiers in the second set of examples are "never," "sometimes," and "always." They communicate to you the strength of the claim being argued and also communicate to you the strength of support necessary to make the argument a good one. Imagine if someone told you that Michael never brushes his teeth, but then you walk pass him in the dorm and there he is with his electric toothbrush buzzing away. Because of the modal qualification, the argument fails, because it was too strong of a claim. If someone said, Michael almost never brushes his teeth, now we're in very different territory.

Modality on the MCAT:

Modality pops up all over the MCAT. You're going to see it in the passages, questions, and answer choices. If you are able to recognize the strength of claims in terms of degrees as modal qualifiers do, you'll be able to see right through wordy passages and instantly know if a passage is making a strong claim, a weak one, or one somewhere in between. Sometimes the CARS will ask you to evaluate the strength of a claim made by the author. Modal qualifiers allow you to get in and out as quickly as possible.

The most important use of modality on the MCAT will show up in the answer choices. This is the easiest way for the MCAT to make a wrong answer choice look pretty good. They'll take a reasonable answer to the question, but then jack it up on modal steroids and make it too extreme (or starve it for two weeks and make it too weak). Then they'll throw it into a question. You'll read it and think, well that isn't quite right, but it sure sounds like something the author was saying in the passage. Hey, it even uses some of the same language...and you pick (C). Unfortunately, (C) has the little sleeper cell "always" and the author doesn't make the claim that XYZ is *always* this way or that. BOOM. Answer choice = wrong. Be weary of extreme modality on the MCAT. It is rare that the MCAT will have an extreme passage. Extreme answer choices are rarely correct, as most authors make measured and reasonable arguments, so it's likely that the answer choices will be too.

Breaking Modality Down:

All modal qualifiers fall along a scale. If you can try to picture something like this in your head, it can be useful to place the modality of whatever argument you're evaluating on a scale.

Never	Rarely	Seldom	Possibly	Intermittently	Occasionally	Often	Frequently	Always
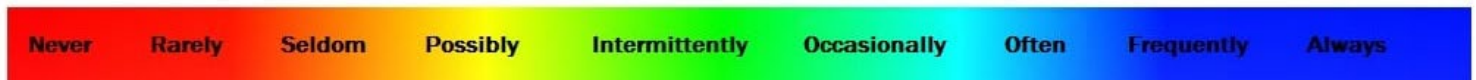
I've included a table below with some common modal qualifiers. You don't need to memorize them, and we're going to talk more about how to use keywords in practicing for the CARS, but for now just become familiar with them and try to keep an eye out when you're reading passages and answering questions.

Strong Claim	Moderate Claim	Weak Claim
Never	Most	Occasionally
Always	Often	Intermittently
Necessarily	Possibly	In some cases
Every	Frequently	
Only	In large measure	
Absolute	Probably	
Continually		

Let's take a look at a few questions to see how modality looks in the wild.

1. Based on information provided in the passage, what does the author most likely believe about psychologists?

    A) They are all corrupt.
    B) They are frequently able to help their patients
    C) They occasionally fall asleep during therapy sessions.
    D) Every psychologist is different. No two are alike.

2. The passage's description of existentialism implies which of the following concerning the human condition?

    A) Most humans live life in bad faith.
    B) All but a lucky few humans go through life unaware of the absurdity of living in the modern world.
    C) All but the stupid realize that existence comes before essence.
    D) Few people utilize philosophy, and even fewer people realize its ultimate value.

Now, these questions were pretty straight forward, and the MCAT will often disguise the modality of an argument or answer choice more subtly, but nonetheless, you are probably beginning to see what I'm getting at when I reference modality. Take question one, if the author argues that the majority of psychologists are charlatans, answer choice (A) may trick quite a few people. Notice that a majority of psychologists is very different than 100% of psychologists. Take a look at question two. What if the author's argument is that most people practice philosophy in their everyday lives without every knowing it. Now the second part of answer choice (D) would be in line with the author's argument, but the first part would not, because the modality is off. The author believes most people use philosophy whereas answer choice (D) says only a few do.

If you practice keeping an eye out for modal qualifiers, before you know it, you'll develop an intuition about the strength of a claim, support, or assumption of the author and will know instantly if an answer choice doesn't match up. It will come with hard work if you practice.

Ok, that's it for today. I'll see you back here tomorrow. Keep it up. Do your daily passage. In tomorrow's post, we jump up to two-a-days. Thanks for stopping by, and don't forget that you can leave a question here on this thread and we'll answer it! Want these last two posts in an easier format? You can download a summary PDF of everything we discussed about arguments here!

Today's Assignment: Do One CARS Passage Under Timed Conditions - Click Here to Take Our Day 7 Passage - Business

"All our dreams can come true if we have the courage to pursue them."
– Walt Disney

Day 8 – Passage Types: Descriptive

Yesterday, we wrapped up our discussion of argumentative passages on the CARS. Today we'll turn our attention to the second major category of passages, the descriptive passage. These passages tend to be easier for most students as they are more familiar, something like reading a well-written Wikipedia article. Descriptive passages are kind of like climbing a mountain. If you learn to see the hand holds, you can get up much quicker without falling for any traps along the way.

Also, today you step up. For the next week, I want you to do two passages a day. Make sure you continue to individually time each passage. If your first passage is a 5 question passage, give yourself 9 minutes. When times up, times up. Then move on to your second passage and do the same. By the time we're done with our 90 days, you're going to have your pacing down perfectly, and you'll be well on your way to the CARS score you want!

The Descriptive Passage:

Descriptive passages are usually easy to spot. You'll know by the time you finish your 10 to 15-second preview that you'll be learning more about XYZ. It could be a survey of the developmental stages of the academic field of linguistics or the obstacles facing social workers in Cameroon. The author will be telling you facts, but will not have a particular claim he or she is advancing. A good way to sort out the differences between descriptive and argumentative passages is to think of the difference between someone telling you about the 21st-century economic obstacles China is facing and someone arguing about how to solve those economic problems. One is telling you something; the other is arguing for something.

Things to Watch Out for:

There are a few ways that the MCAT can make a descriptive passage more difficult. The first is to overload the passage with nuance and a large number of details. Some students will approach a detail heavy passage by taking notes or slowing down to a snail's pace in the hopes of retaining said details. *This is not a good strategy*. The likelihood that you'll master a 600-word detail heavy passage in 4 to 6 minutes is not high. You'll end up reading for details twice: on your first time through, and second when you get to the questions. On the MCAT CARS section, you always want to be reading for structure and the main idea of the passage, not for details. 80% of the details in the passage won't ever be referenced in the questions, so why spend so much time memorizing them? Know the layout of the passage, the landscape. Then when a question comes up that requires a particular detail, you'll know where to look. Don't get bogged down in details.

A second way the MCAT CARS section makes a descriptive passage more difficult is by including a variety of opinions about a particular subject. This is the kind of survey passage where the author discusses different perspectives on a particular issue or cultural phenomenon. What makes these passages difficult is keeping the different perspectives straight, making sure you understand each one and also keeping track of who thinks what. The MCAT loves the "What do Bill and Jill's perspectives on the value and efficacy of after-school craft programs share?" If you don't understand Bill and Jill's perspectives, and if you confuse Jill's position with Bill's, you're sunk. A good way to approach these passages is to slow down when a new viewpoint is introduced. If a name is included, highlight the name so you know more or less where to come back to.

A third way that descriptive passages become more difficult is via the historical narrative arc where the author takes you through the different stages of development of a particular issue or field. The MCAT will then test you on the different stages, their similarities and differences, the particular order they came in, and what caused the development. Like with the different positions passage described previously, it's easy to confuse different developmental stages, confuse their order, or miss the impetus that led to the next stage. Again, highlighting a few words allows you to break up the stages more clearly.

Watch the Flow:

This applies to all passages on the MCAT CARS section but is particularly important with descriptive passages. You'll want to watch the flow of the passage. Are we continuing in the same direction? Is the author providing more detail to drive home this or that point? If you're wading through example after example, speed through the section. _But wait a second...this is new, this is different. We just turned to the right slightly._ Changes like these are rich opportunities for questions. Whenever you have a sense of direction, be sure to flag it in your mind. What are the differences in this new direction compared to the old? What's similar? What motivated the change? If you can master seeing the flow of a passage, you'll get major points come test day.

Keywords:

We're going to talk about how to use keywords to train yourself to see the flow of a passage tomorrow, but I want to give you a brief preview today and, in particular, take a look at the keywords that apply to descriptive passages. You don't need to memorize these, but familiarize yourself with them. Tomorrow we'll go into detail about how to leverage keywords to your advantage.

Continuation	Change	Timing
And	But	Before
Moreover	Yet	After
Also	However	Initially
For example	On the other hand	Finally
Furthermore	In contrast	Then
To illustrate this	Despite	Today
Namely	Although	Next

Continuation words tell you that more of the same is coming. We're still heading in the same direction that we were before. These will be the areas where "Passage Detail" questions come from. If you feel like you understand what the author's driving at, feel free to speed up on these sections.

Change words tell you that the author's taking you in a different direction. These are usually big opportunities to gain insight into the passage and the author's thinking. Why did the change occur? What's significant about it? Are there differences or similarities between the new and the old?

Finally, _timing_ words allow you to quickly compare and contrast different stages of development or evolution. First it was like this, then it became like that, and now everything's change, and it's like this. By keeping a close eye out for these types of words, you'll intuitively get the developmental flow of the passage.

Great job today! We're going to talk a little bit about how to review your practice passages tomorrow. Today we up your daily passage count to two passages per day. Remember this will all be worth it in the end, when you look at your score report and see the number you want.

Today's Assignment: Do Two CARS Passages Individually, Under Timed Conditions - Gain Access to Today's CARS Passages via the 2019 CARS Bootcamp

"Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time."
– Thomas A. Edison

Day 9 – How to Use Keywords

Today, we move on to an advanced review technique: Keywords. Over time, developing your ability to see keywords in CARS passages will allow you to intuitively follow the flow of the passage. You'll see when arguments enter or exit. When the author decides to go in a different direction, or when a new contrasting idea is presented. This is one of the least fun skills to develop for the CARS, but it gives one of the biggest pay offs come test day. You can download a keyword table PDF here that will be easier to read than on a small kindle screen. Print it off and keep it close by!

How to Use Keywords:

You've got to be really careful with this topic. Two of the country's biggest test prep companies have the use of keywords as one of the central components of their approaches to the CARS section. I have their two CARS books sitting in front of me, and each has a 30+ page chapter on keywords. Their strategies in this regard suck. They are charging you so much that they feel like they have to sell you a big thick book, so they fill up a chapter or two with keywords. Using keywords while you're actually taking the test is a really bad idea. If you are consciously trying to remember keywords while you're testing, you're going to slow your pace and throw off your timing. The goal of this entire 30-day course is to build within you a CARS intuition, where you just know instinctively how to take a CARS passage at the correct pace, and you just see the right and wrong answers. We're developing a feel or flow. Having an artificial, piecemeal strategy where you have to remember to do this or that is one of the worst ways to approach the CARS. Don't do it.

Well...ok, then what do I do? Good question. Follow my recommendations throughout this guide and you'll develop that intuition. You will. Trust me. I've helped many, many students develop this same skill. It just takes practice, time, and good instruction, and you have all three. *Well...ok, but what about those keywords*? Another good question!

Keywords offer you handholds to climb through your passage. To identify what is important and what isn't. They allow you to see the twists and turns of the passage, to find the central argument and the author's conclusions. They tell you how the author feels about this or that. They're really important for achieving an ultra-high CARS score, but how you integrate them is critically important. If you just try to memorize them, you're going to be in trouble. From my years of experience training premeds how to read critically, I've come to believe in what I'll call the *Keyword Review*.

The Keyword Review:

The *Keyword Review* is pretty simple. You read your passages and answer the questions just like you normally would. When reading the passages, you don't pay any particular attention to keywords, just read slowly and thoroughly and try to understand the passage as best you can. The review comes in after you complete your passages.

There are three steps:

Step 1: Wait at least two hours between doing the passage and reviewing the passage. I usually recommend you start your studying session with CARS practice, study your sciences, and then end your study session with reviewing your CARS passages.

Step 2: Below, I'm going to give you an exhaustive table of the most important keywords. Print this off and have it in front of you. You'll also need a set of highlighters with each of the colors used in the keyword table. Now read through your passage again slowly, paying no attention to time. As you see keywords in the passage that are on your list, highlight them in the appropriate color in the passage. If you're taking the passages online, print them off. It's important to do the process physically.

Step 3: Immediately following *Step 2*, repeat *Step 2*. Especially early on, you'll be surprised by how many keywords you miss. Be sure to reference the keyword table as you go through the passage. By doing this process repeatedly, eventually keywords will just pop out at you, and you won't even have to look for them. Towards the end of this month, you'll start to feel like Neo seeing the numbers that make up the matrix. (Dear God, if this is a dated reference...all is lost. Please don't tell me you haven't seen the Matrix!) Then proceed on to reviewing the questions.

Doing this process both trains you to see keywords, but also better prepares you to review your questions. You'll cut down on the time it takes to review because most missed questions will be those forehead slapping "Should have had a V8" moments. You'll see instantly where you went wrong.

WARNING: Don't even think about reviewing a practice passage or practice test until your timing is no longer an issue. If you are still struggling to get through your passages with enough time, you shouldn't be reviewing practice passages, you should be doing more practice passages. Read over Days 3 & 5 for tips on how to get your timing down.

Keywords:

We're going to briefly review each category of keywords and how you can use them. You can download a pdf version of the keyword table here. It is also included in the download packet if you purchased this guide in the practice test bundle offer. These are the highest yield keywords on the CARS. (*Don't get overwhelmed. They're just a tool to help you review. Don't memorize!*)

Continuation		
More of the Same:		
And	Moreover	But also
Furthermore	Equally	Not only
Additionally	Plus	Too
In addition to	At the same time	Also
Same/ Similarly	As well as	

Continuation		
Explanation:		
In other words	i.e.	Namely

Continuation		
Examples		
According to	In illustration	For examples
(Citations)	e.g.	

Continuation – Continuation keywords just tell you that more of the same is coming. The author is going to dig down and explain more about what she was just saying. There are three subcategories of *continuation* keywords. The first subcategory is *More of the Same* words group. These do exactly what you think they would. The author is continuing down the same line, he's going to double down and keep going with, you guessed it, "more of the same." The second subcategory is the *Explanation* keywords group. These are words the author might use to further explain and make clearer a difficult or complicated point. It's saying the same thing, but just in more detail. And finally, the third are the *Example* keywords which just lead you into an example of what the author is saying. Examples are good for clearing up confusion, but if you're clear on a point, don't waste too much time on examples. They'll be there for you if you need them.

Contrast		
But	Rather than	By contrast
Yet	Except	Not withstanding
However	Though	Even though
Alternatively	Still	Unlike
Despite	While	Admittedly
Although	Unless	In spite of
In contrast	Otherwise	At the same time
On the other hand	Not	
Different from	Nevertheless	

Contrast – They do exactly what you'd expect, they indicate a change of course. They contrast one position with another. Of all the keywords on this list, these are the most important, because, for both argumentative and descriptive passages, the author is likely to contrast different positions or viewpoints, and this contrast is a great opportunity for a good question. Keep an eye out for these!

Conclusion		
In conclusion	Because	[Person X] claims
We can conclude	Due to	It can be seen that
Thus	Consequently	So
Therefore	Overall	The reason is that
Hence	In short	Since
As a result	(Rhetorical Questions)	For
Ergo	[Person X] believes	Clearly
Points to	[Person X] argues	Which

Conclusion – Conclusion keywords are pretty obvious, but don't underestimate them. They will be incredibly useful when it comes to *Main Idea* questions as well as summarizing a point or position the author is making. The MCAT loves testing your understanding of the conclusions of a passage.

Opinion		
Adverbs	Fortunately	Correctly
Verbs	Thankfully	Impressively
Adjectives	Unfortunately	Problematic
Emotional Language	Expressions of Judgment	Expressions of Qualification
Limitations	Should	Confuses
Sadly	Ought	So-called
Would	Could	Questionable

Opinion – This list could go on forever. There are a ton of words that could cue you into the author's opinion or valuation of a position. Think of these terms as adding color to a black and white objective passage. Could you imagine someone being pissed off at the author? If so, it's likely he or she introduced an opinion into the passage. Be on the lookout for these keywords that clue you in, as the MCAT has been known to throw in an *Author Attitude* question every once and awhile.

Timing		
Before	Finally	Then
After	Now	Earlier/ Later
Initially	Subsequently	Previous/ Next
Secondly	Next	Today
Third	Currently	Modern
Historically	Traditionally	

Timing – We talked about these in detail yesterday, so I won't spend much time with them here, but remember, timing words allow you to track the development of a particular idea, concept, or field. You'll want to use these to keep the different phases straight in your head.

Modality			
High		*Medium*	*Low*
Never	Above all	Frequently	Rarely
Must	Essentially	Likely	Seldom
Constantly	Most of all	Often	Possibly
Continually	Especially	Intermittently	Sometimes
Permanently	Primarily	Occasionally	Might
Necessary	Particularly	In some cases	
Every	In large measure	Probably	
Must	Obviously	Tends to	
Always	Chiefly	May	
Only	Key		
Most	Crucial		
Absolute	Any		
Certain	Very		

Modality – We also talked about these pretty extensively on Day 7, but modality allows you to judge an author's position and make an assessment of the strength of support she will need for the argument to hold. If these feel a little uncomfortable, read over Day 7 again.

Comparison
More/Less
Best/Worst
Better/ Worse
Most/ Least
Especially
Above All

Comparison – Comparison words will be very common on the MCAT whenever more than one argument, position, or viewpoint is expressed in the passage. These allow you to quickly know who the key players are and which the author believes is strongest.

I know that was a lot for one day! Don't get stressed out with all these keywords. This is a more advanced technique so don't worry about it until you've got your timing down. Remember, only consciously use keywords when you're reviewing your practice passages. Follow the steps above, and before you know it, you'll be your own MCAT CARS Neo! You can download the Keywords PDF doc here.

Today's Assignment: Do Two CARS Passages Individually, Under Timed Conditions

"Failure is the key to success; each mistake teaches us something new."
– Morihei Ueshiba

Looking for High-Quality MCAT CARS Practice at a Reasonable Price?

I'm not going to say much about our practice tests, because I don't want this guide to become an infomercial for our products, but I will say that our practice tests currently have over 525+ reviews on Amazon.com with an average rating of 4.5 stars. Our practice tests are the highest rated and most frequently rated CARS practice materials available on Amazon. We have (16) practice tests available (T1-T16) which comes out to 144 CARS Practice Passages.

Day 10 – Health, Wellness, and Stress Management – The Second Key

Ok, so we're ten days into our 90 Days to MCAT CARS Success. We've looked at how to approach passages, how to read correctly, and we've talked about timing enough times to last you the rest of your life. Tomorrow, we're going to start breaking down question types, but today, I want to bring up a topic that some of you will undoubtedly roll your eyes at, but a topic that has nonetheless proven to be one of the most critical characteristics I've seen that separates those who do incredibly well on the MCAT and those who don't: Health, Wellness, and Stress Management. I know some of you have already stopped reading by now, but of all the students who I've taught through the years, those who could stay healthy and could handle the stress always, and I mean always did better than those who could not. PLEASE READ THIS POST!

The MCAT Marathon:

If you intend to become a doctor, which I'm assuming nearly all of you do, the MCAT will be the most important test you take in your life. It's more important than Step I, Step II, and your boards, because without a solid MCAT score, you'll never get a chance to take any of the rest, and if you're striving to get into a top tier school, well the MCAT is the single most important factor in opening that door. The MCAT is incredibly important. How many of you are sweating bullets right now? I know I was when I was studying for the MCAT. It was the most stressful time in my life.

In college, and in particular O-Chem, I succeeded because I had an incredible capacity to cram. I would be irresponsible the three or four weeks between tests, and then a night or two before, I'd stay up all night and cram the reaction mechanisms into my brain just long enough to write them out for the test. Unfortunately for me, this worked. It worked incredibly well. I consistently scored at the top of my class, but 1 I didn't learn much O-Chem in my two semesters and 2 I put myself through hell in terms of stress and my health.

I know I am not unique. Many, many premeds reading this right now are just like me, and unfortunately, you too have probably had success with the high stress, high stakes cramming method. Most premeds are very bright people who learn things quickly and usually have to study less than their peers. The problem is that we've become so accustomed to this approach, that this is the way we study for the MCAT. We throw incredible amounts of time at the test and run ourselves ragged. We eat crappy food, don't exercise, and cut corners on the one thing we absolutely cannot cut corners on. SLEEP. In all my time teaching and tutoring students, the ones who were able to go the distance on the MCAT Marathon, the ones who got the ultra-high scores that their friends envied were the ones that not only worked the hardest but had their priorities straight. There were three things all of these students had in common. I'm going to share those three things with you. If you want to set yourself up for success, make these three changes to your life today and give yourself a fighting chance to do your absolute best come test day. (*I make some suggestions below in regards to books and products I've used and my students have used in the past. I have no connection to any of the authors, companies, or products that I reference. They've just worked for me and my students, and I'm passing them along in the hopes that they'll work for you too.*)

Sleep:

If there were one thing I could change about you right now, just one, it would be that instead of getting 5 or 6 hours of sleep a night, that you'd get 8 or 9 for the entire three or four months you're studying for the MCAT. Without fail, the students who are sleep deprived in my classes are the ones who do the worst. They are slower to pick up new concepts, their thinking is not clear nor direct, and they can't remember anything to save their lives. To these problems, their solution is almost always, to work harder and longer. This invariably cuts into their sleep even more, which causes the death sleep spiral. Commit from now until your test date to get 8 or 9 hours of sleep. Make this as important as your study time. You will learn faster, remember more, and think clearer. I've outlined a few tips below and resources to help. Seriously, do this one thing and it will make a world of difference.

- Set particular times you are going to go to bed and wake up. Stick to this time. If you find yourself rolling around in bed for more than 15 minutes waiting to go to sleep, get up and do something relaxing in low light, like read an interesting, but not too interesting book. Do not study and do not do anything that has to do with an electronic screen. Don't check your texts or Facebook, the blue light in your screen tricks your brain into thinking it's seeing sunlight which throws off your circadian rhythm.

- Be careful about what you drink at night. Try not to drink any caffeine after 2 pm, and while alcohol might help you fall asleep, it actually makes it more difficult to stay asleep, so you're likely to wake up more often at night. Also, if you're more careful about what you drink and when tapering down as the night goes on, you'll have fewer bathroom breaks during the night. Nicotine, which is a stimulant, also takes hours to wear off so that can keep you up too. As a former smoker, I can tell you that smoking caused me a great deal of trouble falling asleep, and it did not help me relax like I thought it did. I smoked the entire time I studied for the MCAT, and it was a huge mistake. If you're more than 60 days out from your test, read this book. It helped me, Jason Marz, and Ellen DeGeneres quit. You'll feel better, think more clearly, and have more energy to study.

- Get comfortable! This usually means, cool, dark, and quite in the bedroom. Easy ways to control this are to get a fan, a cheap sleeping mask, and some decent earplugs.

- Don't use electronics within an hour of going to bed!

Walks:

Studying for this test is incredibly stressful! I recommend taking at least one 30-minute walk a day in the middle of your studying session. Put in your earbuds and listen to some of your favorite music and just go for a walk. Get some sun, feel the breeze, and remember that there is so much more to life than studying for some dumb old test. I had one student in particular who was taking the MCAT for the 4th time when she came to me for help. This was her last shot she said. To say she was stressed was an understatement. One of the first things I prescribed for her was to take her dog for a 30-minute walk every day. The difference in her demeanor within just one week was incredible. Trust me on this, go for a walk every day. At least one!

<u>Friends</u>:

Some students study so much that they let their friendship get pushed to the back burner for a few months. This is not a good idea. It is so easy to lose perspective when studying for a test like the MCAT. We get tunnel vision and begin to think that the entire world, our whole lives ride on how we do on this test. There is so much more to living a good and fulfilling life than getting a particular score on the MCAT, and your friends are one of them. Your friends are going to know you best, and they'll be able to support you when you have a down practice test score or need to gain a broader view of life. Do at least one outing a week with your group of friends. Take the night off and enjoy yourself. I promise you that if you attempt to study for 6 to 8 hours a day for 90 days straight with the MCAT being the only thing you do, *you will not make it*. I have not seen someone make it yet. It is a marathon, and you have to pace yourself.

<u>Other Tips</u>:

- One of the things I do for every MCAT class I teach is buy each of my students a copy of the book The Eight Minute Guide to Meditation. It is an eight-week course that takes you through guided meditations for only eight minutes a day. This is a great way to relieve stress in a short amount of time and clear your mind so when you hit the books you're ready to go!

- If you're someone like me whose default setting is to be stressed out, this book might be just the one for you. It's *the* book for learning ways to cope with stress and become a more relaxed person. I've used it and highly recommend it. Check out The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook.

- And for those of you who struggle with test anxiety (who doesn't on some level) this book has helped many, many people pick up easy and practical tips for managing anxiety during studying and while taking the test. Check out The 10 Best Ever Anxiety Management Tips.

If you made it through today's post, you're on the right track in realizing that doing well on the MCAT involves a lot more than studying harder and longer. You have to manage the other areas of your life and remember that you are human, not a machine. Take these three steps today and you'll see huge gains in all sections of the MCAT. Get at least eight hours of sleep every night from now until your test day. Walk for 30 minutes, every day! And get out and see your friends at least once a week! Oh yeah, and don't forget to do your two passages today. Tomorrow, we'll take a look at the different question types.

Today's Assignment: Do Two CARS Passages Individually, Under Timed Conditions

"To keep the body in good health is a duty...otherwise, we shall not be able to keep our mind strong and clear."
– Buddha

Day 11 – CARS Question Types: The Main Idea

Ok, back to the grind! Hopefully, you actually read through yesterday's post about a few small changes you can make that will have a major impact on your ability to perform your best come test day. It's a big deal so don't skip it! It's the MCAT Marathon, not the MCAT Sprint!

Remember, do <u>two</u> passages today, and be sure to do the keyword review! Today, we start a mini-series on the question types the MCAT uses to populate the CARS section. It's fine to read through these posts and try to utilize the tips I lay out here, but if you are still struggling with your timing (which is fine and normal), don't focus on these more advanced techniques until later. You've got to learn to walk before you can run and strategies pertaining to question types on the CARS are some of the most advanced we're going to explore, so cut yourself some slack if everything takes some getting used to. Let's get into it!

<u>*The Main Idea:*</u>

Main Idea questions may seem easy as they are asking you in the most general terms, "What is this passage about?" But often, *Main Idea* questions are also the ones that intimidate students the most. Instead of zooming in on one manageable portion of the passage, one detail or one argument, *Main Idea* questions require you to actually understand what the author is trying to do in a global sense i.e. why the author wrote the passage and what's the point of it all? If you struggle to keep arguments straight, to see the big picture, to understand the "Why" of the passage, *Main Idea* questions are going to be tricky for you, at least initially. Beyond the particulars of the *Main Idea* question type, having a firm grasp of the main idea of the passage is going to help you answer almost every CARS question you'll see on test day in one way or another. It's not always easy to see the main idea at first, but with a little practice, we'll get you there. And fortunately, we've got a few tricks you can use which make it seem as if the *Main Idea* comes to you. I call this approach, *Painting to the Main Idea*:

The first thing you want to do is to take a look at your frame. During your preview read of the passage, you should be able to figure out more or less what the frame of the passage is. This is the broadest category that your passage fits in. The frame of a passage on General Lee's strategy at Gettysburg would be the Civil War. Within a frame, there are thousands upon thousands of possible subjects for a passage. When we are framing a passage, we are looking for the broadest category that still tells us something about the passage so we can use that frame to organize our thinking about it. Identify the frames for the following passages snippets:

Examining the gradual changes in rural Spanish in the Dominican Republic.

The philosophical implications for young existentialists post-World War II.

The social significance and impact frozen dinners had on the 1950s familial unit.

Once you've identified the frame, you've not only framed what you are talking about (the painting inside the frame), but you've also learned something about what you aren't going to be talking about in regards to the passage. This can be incredibly useful when trying to eliminate answer choices. In establishing a frame for the passage, you've set yourself the broadest boundary for a possible answer to a _Main Idea_ question.

Notice for the first passage, the frame might be something like _linguistic change._ Thus, we know that any answer choices to a _Main Idea_ question absolutely cannot have a broader scope than linguistic change and that in all likelihood the scope will actually be more narrow than the frame. Think of the frame as the outer boundary and that the correct answer will always be contained within it. For the second passage, the frame might be something like _post-WWII existential philosophy_, or maybe just even post-_WWII philosophy_. It would depend on your 10 to 15 second preview read of the passage. For the third, it might be something like _social influences on the family_. Notice that a more general answer choice concerning sociology wouldn't be narrow enough to be a correct answer to a Main Idea question as it resides outside the frame.

What's the Subject?

After you've established the frame, you're going to narrow your focus to find the subject of the passage. This is like saying that the subject matter of the painting is the field of wild roses. Whereas with the frame, we said what was in and what was out, with the subject, we get at what it is that the painting is about. Within the frames of the _Civil War_, _Linguistic Change_, _Post-WWII Philosophy_, and _Social Influences on the Family_, there are endless subjects that a passage might take up. For the example passage on General Lee's Strategy at Gettysburg, the subject is just that, General Lee's Strategy at Gettysburg. This is what the passage is about. This is the material of the passage. It is the "What" in the question "What" is the author talking about? Whereas you should know the frame by the time you finish your 10 to 15 second preview read, your subject may not become clear until later into actually reading the passage.

If the subject of a passage is the "What," the point is the "Why." Why did the artist paint the painting? Did she paint it to evoke the feelings of passion and love, or to remind you of the experience of a lazy relaxing day in a field of wild flowers? In terms of the CARS, why did the author write the passage? Why didn't she just leave the page blank? In the case of the Civil War passage about Lee, it isn't clear based on the information given to you, but a few possibilities include:

Lee's strategy was risky.

Lee's strategy should have won him the war.

Lee's strategy was ill-conceived.

The failure of Lee's strategy turned the tide of the Civil War.

The possibilities are endless, so I won't be exhaustive here, but what I want you to see is that the point of the passage is why the author wrote it. If you are able to frame the passage, understand its subject, and identify its *point*, you've figured out the main idea of the passage.

Examples of Main Idea Question Stems:

The MCAT will ask you for the main idea in a number of different ways. Below, I've included a few examples. Main Idea questions are as general as they come on the MCAT CARS, so this will be your first indication you're dealing with a *Main Idea* question type.

The main idea of this passage is:

The author's central argument is:

The central thesis of this passage is that:

The author most likely wrote this passage in order to:

Which of the following best characterizes the main idea of the passage?

What is the author's central concern?

The author can best be viewed as a proponent of:

The intended audience of this passage is most likely:

– General questions have general answers!

– Look for the argument or idea that is so central to the passage that without it, the passage would no longer make sense, it would have no teeth, its purpose would be unintelligible.

– Eliminate answer choices which contain arguments the author doesn't actually make in the passage, and then sort through the ones she does and determine which is the most significant. Be on the lookout for answer choices which subtly flip the author's argument while retaining her language.

– Look for too specific or too narrow of answer choices. If an idea is only touched on in one paragraph, it is not likely to be the central argument of the passage.

– While general questions will almost always have general answers, be wary of too broad of answer choices. While the too narrow or too specific trickster answer choice is the most common, the MCAT has been known to widen the scope far beyond the passage to create an incorrect answer choice.

–Be on the lookout for "correct" arguments, which are arguments that the author makes, but that are not the central argument or thesis of the passage. Once you think you've found your choice, decide if the passage would make any sense without the idea represented in the answer choice. If it wouldn't, you know you've got your answer, because a passage without its main idea makes no sense!

Ok, that's it for today. Keep an eye out for Main Idea questions as they come up in your daily two passages and also be sure to integrate the tips we've laid out for you. Great job. It's going to pay off!

Today's Assignment: Do Two CARS Passages Individually, Under Timed Conditions

Day 12 – CARS Question Types: Passage Detail

Today, we're taking up one of the most familiar question types, the Passage Detail question. Many students assume that these questions are some of the easiest on the CARS, and while in many cases they are relatively easy to answer, they can also be the source of a lot of wasted time which can have a major impact on your section score. We'll show you how to handle these questions to make sure you get them correct while not wasting too much time. Make sure to do your two passages today!

The Passage Detail Question:

Whereas *Main Idea* questions ask for you to see the big picture, *Passage Detail* questions ask you to zoom in and test your comprehension of a particular idea or argument laid out by the author. They are fairly common on the MCAT CARS, but not as common as you might expect when using other companies' prep materials. Unfortunately, companies like Exam Krackers and Kaplan, in particular, are known for having a higher than AAMC percentage of passage detail questions. This is really a disadvantage if you are only using these materials to prepare, as it isn't simulating the actual CARS experience that you'll face come test day. Thus, practicing with accurate CARS prep materials i.e. reading passages and answer questions on CARS simulated tests is critically important. Kaplan is much worse than Exam Krackers, to the point that I wouldn't recommend using their materials at all. Exam Krackers is much better but still is deficient in this regard, while in other areas producing reasonably good tests. You're fine to use them early on when you're still getting your timing down, but as you get closer to your test date, you're going to want to start using more accurate CARS prep materials.

There are two keys to answering a *Passage Detail* question correctly:

    1) Identifying what you need to know to answer the question

    2) Knowing where to look in the passage for the information you need

You will get better identifying what you need to know to answer the question as you continue doing practice passages. Eventually, your MCAT CARS intuition will grow so strong that it will just be obvious to you. As to knowing where to look in the passage, this will also come with practice. You won't have too much difficulty if you remember to read for structure not detail on your first pass. I'm not talking about skimming; I'm talking about understanding the landscape of the passage. What is the author doing in paragraph one? And in two? What is last paragraph about? If you have an idea about where the author discusses the mating patterns of early human societies, it's not important if you completely understood what the author was getting at on your first read through of the passage. If a question comes up about it, you'll know where to go.

Passage Detail questions are some of the most dangerous on the MCAT CARS section because unlike many questions on the CARS, you know that the answer to the question is right in front of you. If you just keep looking, you'll eventually find it, the thinking goes. Sadly, so many students fall into this trap and waste five, six, even seven minutes on one question. Even if you do get that question right, you've probably just cost yourself two or three points elsewhere on the test. If you do this two or three times on the test, you've just ruined your CARS score. It can have a huge impact. So remember, if you run into a hard question:

   1) The first time you think to yourself, "I'm spending a lot of time on this question" look at the clock and give yourself 30 more seconds.

   2) Eliminate any answer choices you can.

   3) After 30 seconds, guess, mark the question for review later, and say to yourself "I'll come back to this later once I get the easy ones."

If you do this, *you will have time at the end of the test to come back*, and more often than not, giving yourself a little time to clear your head, you'll see the question anew and what you were missing the first time.

Please, please, get in the habit of doing this on questions that are hard for you. Timing is the number one key to the CARS section, and until you have that down, a 127+ score simply isn't possible. Trust me on this one. If timing is still a problem for you, which is to say if you have to rush to finish and you don't have any time left at the end, **do not go back to the passage after you finishing reading it.** Don't do it. The reason you aren't finishing in time is because you're spending too much time going back. I guarantee that if you do this, you will finish on time and will not see a negative impact on your score. In fact, many students who do this are surprised to find that they actually see an improvement because they aren't losing out on easy questions because of time pressure.

Examples of Passage Detail Question Stems:

The author states that Picasso believed that:

According to the passage, the American Revolutionary War was fought in order to:

The passage suggests which of the following concerning the impact of educational reforms enacted by Reagan?

The author believes all of the following EXCEPT:

Based on the discussion in paragraph three, Rodin's approach to sculpture was widely regards as:

Which of the following claims does the author NOT make in the passage?

Which of the following assertions most closely resembles the author's beliefs concerning the role of the Federal Reserve in the modern US economy?

– Read for structure, not detail on your first reading of the passage.

– Don't go back to the passage if you're still having trouble finishing on time. Eliminate the answer choices you can, guess, mark it, and come back later.

– Only go back to look for a detail if you know where it is located in the passage. If you're just going to do a general review of the passage in the hopes of finding something that will help you answer the question, eliminate the answer choices you can, guess, mark it, and leave it until you've finished the rest of the questions in that passage set. I can't tell you how many times I've found the answer to a difficult question while answering another question in the set. Leave the hard ones for the end of the passage, after you've spent 5 to 7 more minutes answering the other questions in the set and thinking about the passage. Leave the hardest questions for the end, and they will seem to answer themselves!

– Pick the word you choose to look for when going back to the passage carefully. Don't pick a word that is generic because it will come up multiple times in the passage, wasting your time. If we're looking for an answer concerning General Lee's strategy at Gettysburg, looking for *Lee* or *Gettysburg* is probably going to be too generic; however, the word *strategy* is likely to be connected to the information that you're looking for. You'll get better at this with practice.

– Don't be intimidated by the out of nowhere answer choice. The MCAT will sometimes give you an answer choice that is never referenced in the passage but would seem to be a good answer to the question. Answers to Passage Detail questions have to be in the passage. Thus, the out of nowhere answer choice has to be wrong. They include it to scare you, so you'll think you missed something and go back and spend another three or four minutes re-reading the passage. Don't do it. Trust yourself. If you don't remember it being in there, if you find yourself saying, "Hey, where did that come from?" eliminate that answer choice!

Ok, that's it for today. Great job! I know going through the question types isn't the sexiest thing in the world, but it will help you over the long term with your score. How are your daily passages going? Is your timing improving?

Today's Assignment: Do Two CARS Passages Individually, Under Timed Conditions

"*The best revenge is massive success.*"
– Frank Sinatra

Day 13 – CARS Question Types: Implication

So now that we've got two of the easier question types out of the way, we're going to take a look at two of the more difficult types over the next two days. Today, we'll look at the Implication question type and tomorrow, the inference

question type. These are sometimes tricky to get, at first, so take your time and don't get frustrated if it doesn't click on the first pass. That's normal for new things in general and very common in particular on the MCAT CARS. This is why we practice!

The Implication Question Type:

As we discussed on Day 6, an implication of a passage is a necessary, unstated conclusion external to the argument. Now some might be tempted to confuse this with an inference, as the two are similar, but the primary difference is that an implication is externally relevant, and an inference is internally relevant. Take a look at this example:

Michael loves to eat hamburgers. It's lunch time, and there's a hamburger joint right next door!

What's implied by the two sentences? Well, a reasonable implication taking into account all the evidence that is provided is that Michael is probably going to go around the corner and eat a hamburger for lunch. Notice that this is external to the information provided in the sentence. There's no reference in the implication to the component pieces of the argument in and of themselves. This would be contrasted with the possible inference that Michael's favorite food is hamburgers. Notice, that this inference is an internal, unstated conclusion. An inference references the component pieces of the argument. The inference tells us something about Michael, an internal thing, whereas an implication tells us something that Michael might do, an external thing.

An important point in determining the strength of an implication or inference is the degree to which it is necessary, which is to say the degree to which it must be the case. This is the measure of the strength of the inference or implication. In this example, it's reasonable to see the sentence implying that Michael's going to eat a hamburger for lunch at the hamburger joint next door or to infer that Michael's favorite food might be hamburgers, but neither of these is 100% a sure thing. Thus, they aren't the strongest forms of implication or inference.

The key to answering an *Implication* question type correctly is to look for unstated conclusions that are well supported by the passage. With implication questions, there will always be points of connection between the implication and the passage. Don't do mental gymnastics to try and make an answer choice fit. The AAMC has an airtight answer explanation/ justification for every single question on the CARS. There is a correct way to answer the question, and there is a wrong way to answer the question (in fact three ways). You want to train yourself to see and think like the AAMC MCAT writers. Look for that definite connection and you will find *Implication* questions to be some of the easiest on the CARS once you get the hang of them.

Examples of Implication Question Stems:

  The author implies that George Washington is NOT:

The author says "As the boat began to sink, the cowards began to run towards the life rafts," but also "many gentlemen proceeded to help the women and children into the rafts while remaining on the doomed ship." These beliefs imply:

The passage implies that the difference between World War I and World War II was primarily one of:

Implicit in the statement "Philosophers are often derided by the masses but nonetheless are necessary for the proper functioning of society" is the idea that:

Regarding the concept of food insecurity, the author implies:

What does the author imply regarding the relationship between those who own capital and those who do not?

Tips for Implication Questions:

– Use the *Flip Test* to evaluate a possible implication. Sometimes the MCAT makes it difficult to connect an implication outlined in an answer choice and the passage. It is often easier to flip the implication in the answer choice and try to connect it to the passage. For example, in a passage that discusses the inequality between those who own capital and those who don't, it might be easier to see that an answer choice that says the author implies the relationship is predatory is correct when you flip it. What's the opposite of a relationship that is predatory? Maybe something like beneficial? Is the author saying that the nature of the relationship is beneficial? ABSOLUTELY NOT. Thus, you can be pretty sure that you've got the correct answer choice. Answer choices which do not contain an implication of the passage will make as little sense when flipped as they do when not.

– Use the support given by the author in making his argument to look for the connection between the passage and the implication. There's got to be a connection or it can't be an implication.

– Remember that implications are external, unstated conclusions of the argument being made. A trick is to ask yourself whether or not something is forward looking. An inference looks backward, telling you something about the pieces that make up the argument. An implication tells you something about a possible future.

– If a central implication of the passage is found not to be true, the passage and its arguments fall apart. Ask yourself when you read through the answer choices: if this isn't the case, what effect would it have on the passage, if any? If it has a big effect, you've probably found your answer.

– An implication will be supported by clear positions taken by the author in the passage. Do not strain logic to support an answer choice, the connection will be clear. If you find yourself squinting, standing on one leg, and slowly spinning counter-clockwise in order to make an answer choice look correct, you can confidently eliminate that answer choice. The section name is *Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills*, not Mental Gymnastics 301. Don't let hyper-vigilance cost you points on test day. So many test takers are so desperate to score well on the MCAT that they waste time and miss out on points convincing themselves bad answers are good so they "don't" miss a single one of those precious points. Unfortunately, such an approach has the opposite effect. Be confident in yourself!

Great job. We'll take a look at inference questions tomorrow. Don't forget to do your two passages today. Tomorrow we take a break from doing passages for a day, and then we'll be upping it to three passages, so enjoy two passages a day while it lasts! Leave everything you have on the table. Keep up the hard work!

Today's Assignment: Do Two CARS Passages Individually, Under Timed Conditions

"To have success, you can't let failure stop you. To have great success, you can't let success stop you."
– Robert Brault

Day 14 – CARS Question Types: Inference

Today we're going to finish the second of the two unstated question types on the CARS. Yesterday we looked at the Implication question type and today we take up the Inference type. These two have significant similarities in what they test and the skills required to answer them correctly. Try to think of them as a set and you'll be well served. Let's get to it!

<u>*The Inference Question Type:*</u>

Inferences are unstated, necessary internal conclusions that concern one or more of the components of an argument. Whereas *Main Idea* or *Passage Detail* questions deal with particular stated aspects of the passage, *Inference* and *Implication* questions deal with implicit, unstated information. These latter question types are not dealing with what *might possibly* be true. They are asking you about things which *must* be true or, at least, are highly probable. These two question types make up about 15% of the questions on the CARS or somewhere around eight questions in a section test. *Inference* questions differ in one critical way from implication questions. Implication questions imply something about outside cases or something in the future, but always something external to the argument. Inferences tell you something internal to the argument. Take one of the most standard examples of an inference:

All men are mortal. – (Premise)
Socrates is a man. – (Premise)

Therefore, Socrates is mortal. – (Inference)

Notice that in the argument, it is never stated that Socrates is mortal, but based on the argument, this must be true. Thus, the unstated, but necessary conclusion of the argument is that Socrates is mortal. This is an inference because it describes something internal to the argument, namely something we did not previously know or had not been previously stated about Socrates. Take a look at another example:

All meat comes from animals. – (Premise)
Beef is a type of meat. – (Premise)

Therefore, beef comes from an animal. – (Inference)

If the premises are true, and the directionality of the interpretation is correct, the inference must also be true. Take a look at these next two examples. What's wrong with them?

All A are B. – (Premise)
C is a B. – (Premise)

Therefore, C is an A. (Inference)

All apples are fruit. – (Premise)
Bananas are fruit. – (Premise)

Therefore, bananas are apples. (Inference)

Why don't these two inferences follow? Especially in the second case, it's clear that this isn't right. The issue in the first case and the second case is one of directionality of the application of the premises. Just because all A's are B's does not necessarily mean that all B's are A's. This could be the case, but it doesn't have to be. Think of the example that while all squares are rectangles, not all rectangles are squares. The category of square has more limitations on it. It is more specific. In the second example, the category of *fruit* is more general, whereas the category of *apples* is more specific, namely round, red fruit. This is why bananas are not apples.

This might seem to be getting into the weeds, and in truth, we're pushing on the boundaries of the kinds of thinking the MCAT will require of you, but if you see how inferences work close up, you'll be better prepared to evaluate which are valid and strong and which are not. Let's take a look at a few example question stems.

Examples of Inference Question Stems:

Based on the author's treatment of the US's counter-terrorism strategies, it is reasonable to infer which of the following?

It is reasonable to conclude that the author believes what about George Washington Jr?

Which of the following inferences is most justified based on the author's arguments concerning the enfranchisement of women in the early 20th century?

Campbell's argument that Star Wars is an example of a mythological journey allows for which of the following inferences?

A reasonable supposition from the passage concerning the primary problem that plagues most philosophers is that:

Apparently, both sides participating in the debate assume that:

According to one of the positions presented, government is an "affair of invention and contrivance" and is supremely concerned with questions "of means and end." If both of these premises are true, which conclusion is most reasonable?

– When you believe you've correctly identified the inference, be sure to double check the premises that support it, both that they are true and also that the directionality of the application of the premises is correct.

– Look for the necessary conclusions of the support given in the passage.

– What are the underlying assumptions that the author relies on to make his or her argument? What must be true for the argument to be true? These assumptions will lead you to the correct inference.

– With inference questions, try to identify which of the answer choices is grounded in the support given in the passage. Then remove these pieces and see if it affects the author's thesis. If the author's thesis is weakened or bankrupt without the premises, you know have identified the essential premise and thus a necessary unstated conclusion, which with inference questions, equals the correct answer.

– Usually, you'll just have a feeling about inference questions. The best answer is the one that seems to make the most sense. Which one is most supported by the passage? More often than not, that's your answer.

Great job today! I'd recommend looking at inference and implication questions together as they're similar and interconnected, in fact, most companies teach them as the same thing, but I believe the differences are significant enough to invest the time with each. Today's your break day, so don't do any passages today. We'll start up with three tomorrow!

Today's Assignment: Take a break! Don't do any practice passages today.

> _"What seems to us as bitter trials are often blessings in disguise."_
> – Oscar Wilde

Day 15 – CARS Question Types: Application

Today, we up it to three passages per day, so every day this week you'll do three passages, resetting the timer after each passage. By now, you should be close to finishing your passages on time or hopefully with a little bit to spare. Make sure that if you're still having trouble finishing on time that you don't allow yourself to go back to the passage after your first pass. Our topic for today is the Application question type. Let's get to it!

The Application Question Type:

The _Application_ question type is on one of the most common question types on the CARS. The first four question types we covered make up roughly 43% of the questions (22 questions) on the CARS, whereas the _Application_ question type makes up roughly 20% of the CARS or around 10 questions, so be prepared. You're going to see these questions on test day, but if you practice now, you'll find them to be some of the easiest when you get to taking the real thing!

Application questions require you to apply information provided in the passage to a new set of circumstances. Sometimes these questions will require you to select which position the author would be most likely to support. Another version of the application question type will ask you to select what the author's most likely response would be to newly introduced information. Finally, the third most common type of A*pplication* question asks you based on information given in the passage to predict an outcome or consequence of some new situation.

The key to *Application* questions is identifying the connection between the new case or situation and the passage or the author's position. There will always be a point of connection. Always. Look for similarities between answer choices and the passage. If you cannot find a strong point of connection upon which the *Application* relies, then the answer choice is wrong. The connections for *Application* questions have to be clear cut. One of the best ways to attack *Application* questions is to try and get inside the author's head and adopt his or her worldview. As you read the passage, try to formulate a picture of the author. What does she look like? What interests her? What political party does she belong to? What issues are important to her? As you formulate this image, you'll be better equipped to make predictions in applying the passage information to new situations.

If you find yourself being asked to predict a particular outcome, look for causal language in the passage, where particular results must follow from particular causes. Cause and effect language is very important with these types of questions, so keep an eye out for it.

Examples of Application Question Stems:

The author would be most likely to AGREE with which of the following positions?

It was determined that most first year Ph.D. candidates cry during class at least once. The author would most likely respond to this new information by:

Suppose that most pirates did not want to be a pirate when they were young children. Based on the passage, the author would be most likely argue in response to this that:

Which of the following budget proposals would the author be most likely to support?

The author would be most OPPOSED to which of the following assumptions commonly made about robot pirates?

Which of the following situations would the author most likely characterize as similar to the economic conditions that led to the economic downturn of 2008?

If the author is correct concerning the development of social norms in early human societies, the most likely consequence of the author's position in regards to early childhood development would be:

<u>*Tips for Application Questions:*</u>

– *Application Questions* require you to reason outside of the passage. The key is to take the positions outlined by the author in the passage and apply them to new situations. For there to be a possible application, however, there must be similarities. If you're able to identify the similarities, the ways in which the old is similar to the new, you'll be able to see correct and incorrect applications more clearly.

– Develop a mental image of the author as you read the passage. Have a sense of how the author feels about the material in the passage, but also how he or she might approach different issues more broadly concerned. Would the author be more likely to watch Fox News or MSNBC? Is the author religious or an atheist? A scientist or a philosopher? Try to figure out his values or her beliefs about the world. This will allow you to make a better prediction about what he or she might think about something new.

– How does the new information in the question stem connect to the passage? There has to be a point of connection, or the answer choice can't be correct. It's that simple.

– When the CARS gives you a large question stem with a quote or a lot of new information in it, it's sometimes better to skip ahead to the end of the question where the colon or question mark is to figure out what the question is asking you to do. If you know you're supposed to be looking for something that opposes this new information right from the beginning; you won't waste any time having to read and reread the long question stem a few times to make sense of it.

– Words and phrases like Suppose, Consider, Assume, Imagine, or It was determined that, are dead giveaways that you've got an application question. Breakdown the question stem into parts, having clear in your mind 1) What's the question asking me to do and 2) What's the new information? Sometimes Application questions are huge, and they are easy to get lost in if one isn't careful from the start!

Ok, we've only got a few more days left of question types, so we're getting there! I know this is boring stuff, but it's going to pay off. Keep doing your keyword review of your passages, especially now as you've upped your daily dose to three passages! We're really starting to get you there. Before too long, you're going to be an expert. How's your timing going? Feel free to leave a question here if you've got one! Thanks for reading and see you back here tomorrow!

Today's Assignment: Do Three CARS Passages Individually, Under Timed Conditions

"The starting point of all achievement is desire."
– Napoleon Hill

Attachments

MCAT CARS Keyword List

Day 16 – CARS Question Types: Integration of New Information

Today, we're going to take a look at one of the most difficult question types on the CARS, the Integration of New Information question type. These make up about 15% of the questions you'll see on test day (around 5 questions), so while they aren't the highest yield area to pick up points if you're still struggling to break 125, if you're shooting for that 127+ score, you'll need to have these down. Don't forget to do your three passages today. We'll get you to the CARS score you want. Just trust me and do the work!

The Integration of New Information Question Type:

As you might suspect, an *Integration of New Information* question does exactly what you might expect. It gives you new information and then asks you to integrate that information in a particular way regarding the passage. The MCAT may ask you how the new information affects the passage or the author's central argument. Does it weaken it? Strengthen it? Have no effect? In some ways, *integration* questions are the opposite of the *application* type we looked at yesterday in that application questions require you to apply the passage outwardly, whereas *integration* questions require you to determine the internal effects on the passage of new outside information.

Integration questions ultimately come down to asking you about claims made by the author in the passage. The new information will either affect one or more of these claims or it won't. If it doesn't, there's no effect, nothing changes. If there is an effect, this is the place where the MCAT will want you to make an evaluation. Thus, the two critical steps for integration questions are to 1) Identify the claim(s) in the passage that are affected by the new information provided in the question stem and 2) evaluate the ways in which these claims are effected.

A strong sense of the structure of the passage and the various subtopics discussed will make it much easier for you to identify the important claims, so keep up your practice on reading for structure, and if you develop your capacity to identify support the author gives for his or her claims in the passage, you will be better equip to evaluate how these claims are affected by the new information. By far, the most common way for new information to affect a claim is by either strengthening or undermining the support the author gives that claim in the passage. Thus, after you identify the claim in the passage, search for the support the author gives. Then cross reference this support with the new information given in the question stem. Most of the time, the right answer will just jump out at you.

Examples of Integration of New Information Question Stems:

Suppose that a modern classics scholar stated that although Aristophanes' primary goal was to make people laugh, he did have a latent political agenda and thoroughly believed that everyone ought to engage in political action. If this scholar's statement were found to be true, what would be the effect on the author's central thesis?

A manuscript of Dante was discovered that showed that he did not believe in a literal hell. How would this new information affect the author's claims?

Which of the following findings would most weaken the author's argument?

Suppose that De Francesco prided himself on the clarity and accessibility of his poetry. Which of the following claims made by the author would most be called into

According to one authority on constitutional government, "the individual is the primary and foundational unit of a constitutional government." This authority would probably:

Suppose that a survey of successful modern leaders finds that some study history while others do not. The author would most likely respond to this challenge by saying:

In recent years, foreign intervention has led to the establishment of democracies in a range of nations across the world. The argument presented for government being understood as a product of natural history suggests that this would:

Tips for Integration of New Information Questions:

– Any easy way to narrow down your answer choices is to first make a quick pass through the answer choices looking for tricksters that have no connection to the passage and new information provided. The correct answer choice will require both. An answer choice having a connection to one or the other is not enough as the question is asking you to integrate this new information or said another way connect it to the passage correctly.

– Look to the support the author gives his or her central claims in order to evaluate how the new information affects the passage. The far majority of *Integration of New Information* questions deal with the central thesis of the passage, so if you find yourself struggling to find the connection point for the new information provided, look to the main idea for help.

– With *Integration of New Information* questions, you always have to be sure that you're answering the question in front of you, not one you've made up. It's very easy to grant yourself too wide a gate to walk through. The CARS is a very logical, step by step, test. Every answer choice has clear and defensible reasons for why it is either right or wrong. Don't get too loose with your approach to these types of questions.

– One of the ways the MCAT will trick you is to correctly connect the new information with the right claim or argument in the passage, but then misrepresent the effect the new information has. For example, if the new information strengthens the author's claim, the MCAT will tell you it undermines it or has no effect. Many test takers will see the point of connection and via the power of suggestion accept the effect the MCAT gives without further thought. Don't be one of the students who fall for this.

– There are three parts to answering an *Integration* question. 1) The new information, 2) The relevant passage information, and 3) The connection between the two. The CARS has to give you, at least, one of these pieces and then will ask you about one or both of the other parts. If you can train yourself to identify these three pieces, *Integration* questions will become your favorite type on the MCAT. EASY POINTS!

Great job today! I know it's a lot to take in. Try to integrate as much of this information as you can, but the key for right now is to make sure you're doing your three passages a day. Little by little, the gains will build up and before you know it, you'll be a CARS pro. Keep up the good work and don't forget your three passages for today.

Today's Assignment: Do Three CARS Passages Individually, Under Timed Conditions

"In order to succeed, your desire for success much be greater than your fear of failure."
– Robin Williams

Day 17 – CARS Question Types: Attitude

Over the next two days, *we're going to take a look at two different question types that occasionally show up on the CARS, but may or may not be there depending on the test you get. These are going to be particularly important for those of you shooting for 128+. If your timing is still rough or if you don't feel like you have a good grasp of the other question types yet, I'd read through these next two posts, but not spend too much more time on them until you get the other pieces of the puzzle into place. Remember your three passages for today!*

The Attitude Question Type:

Attitude questions are the seemingly highly subjective questions asking how the author "feels" about the topic at hand. In some cases, the MCAT might ask you about how someone represented in the passage or a school of thought might feel about this or that topic. There are also passages where you're asked about what two or more differing positions might think or feel about each other.

The key to answering these questions correctly is keeping an eye out for value judgments made by the author concerning the different parties in the passage. Look back to your keyword list and familiarize yourself with terms that imply a particular judgment. Does the author seem uninterested or bored? Is the author angry or is she more hopeful about the future? One of the best ways to deal with these questions is to think of a scale of 1 to 7 and try to place the author somewhere on the scale. I like to think of it in terms of colors. Is the author red, blue or green? Be sure to do this without looking at the answer choices first, as they might color your judgment.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Furious	Angry	Irritated	Neutral	Hopeful	Pleased	Overjoyed
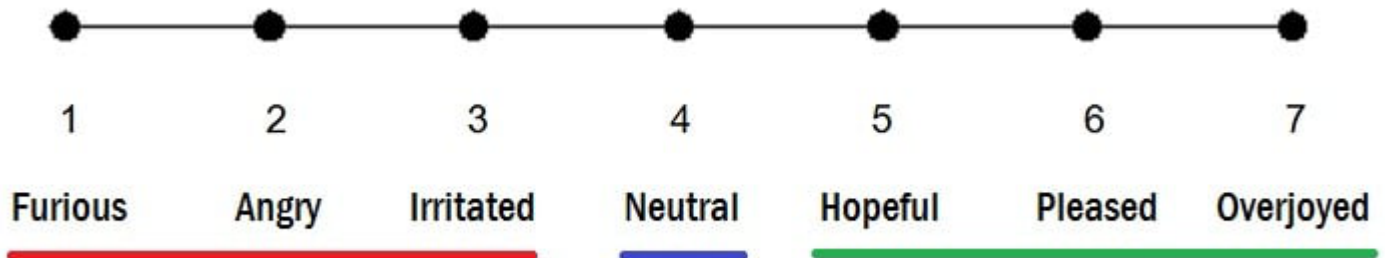
After deciding where you think the author resides, then look at the answer choices. If you believe the author to be in the red zone, you can immediately eliminate any blue or green answer choices. This will at worst leave you choosing between two answer choices. Is the author angry or irritated? It's wise to error on the side of being conservative on the CARS, so if you're having trouble deciding, pick the weaker of the two. There will always be clear evidence to support an extreme attitude, and if you can't find it, it's probably because it's not there. Remember that on the MCAT, extreme answer choices are frowned upon! Moderation is almost always correct. (Unless it's not of course, but you'll know when that's the case based on the passage.)

Examples of Attitude Questions:

    1) The author's attitude towards Chinese art is best described as:

        A) Objective and neutral
        B) Interested and accepting
        C) Supportive and hegemonic
        D) Disinterested and academic

    2) The attitude of the author concerning Morante's La Storia can best be described as

        A) Objective
        B) Approving
        C) Skeptical
        D) Hopeful

Tips for Attitude Questions:

– Look for value judgments made by the author.

– Rank the author on the 1 to 7 scale and color code him or her before looking at the answer choices. Then color code the answer choices and eliminate the ones that don't match up

– If you're having trouble deciding, go with the more conservative and moderate answer choice. The MCAT will always give you clear support for extreme answer choices. If it's not there, it's probably not the right answer.

Great job today! We have only one more question type and then you're done! (With question types.) Attitude questions are some of the most tricky on the CARS, but if you practice seeing them in terms of colors, they usually aren't that difficult. Keep up the good work and don't forget your three passages for today.

Today's Assignment: Do Three CARS Passages Individually, Under Timed Conditions

"Winners are willing to pay the price that losers won't."
– Anonymous

Day 18 – CARS Question Types: Meaning of a Term

We only have one question type left after today, and then you'll have seen them all. I know this has been a long, boring, slog through the in's and out's of question types on the CARS, but I promise you all your hard work will be worth it when you're anxiously refreshing your screen to see when the AAMC posts your score, and then....Boom! There's the number you want. Keep up the hard work. We'll get there.

Meaning of a Term questions are some of the easiest questions on the MCAT, but because they only show up one or two times every few tests, they aren't all that familiar to most test takers. There will always be a reference word, phrase, or quote in the question stem which you will then be required to interpret or translate into a broader understanding that is given in one of the answer choices.

Context is going to be key, so look for where in the passage the phrase or word is used and read before and after in order to get a sense of the author's usage of the term. The MCAT will always provide sufficient grounds to definitively answer a _Meaning of a Term_ question, so often a synonym or phrase in previous or preceding few sentences will clue you into the way the particular term is being used. Come up with your own prediction as to the definition of the term before looking at the answer choices. This will make sure you're not thrown off by any trickster answer choices the MCAT plants. Make your prediction definition broad so you'll be sure the correct answer choice fits inside!

Examples of Meaning of a Term Question Stems:

As used in the passage, "aphrodisiac" refers to:

Which of the following phrases is most synonymous with the way in which the author uses the term "hairy" in his claim that "August 24th was a day full of hairy situations."

The author's use of the term "glad-handed" most likely means:

In paragraph four, what is the author's most likely intended meaning in writing that Queen Elizabeth was crusty?

Tips for Meaning of a Term Questions:

– Beware of definitions that are common or look like they're from the dictionary. Remember that the MCAT is a test designed to separate students so that medical schools can evaluate them. Every question is designed to do this. Accordingly, the MCAT is not going to give you a question that 99% of test takers would get right. It's just too easy and defeats the purpose of the test. Don't be fooled by the "too easy" answer choice.

– Come up with your own definition before looking at the answer choices. It's harder for the MCAT to trick you that way.

We've only got one day left on question types. Keep up the great work and don't forget to do your three passages today. You've really covered a lot of ground in the past 18 days. You should be proud of yourself. You're investing in your future, and once you're done with this test, you'll never have to do it again. See you back here tomorrow.

Today's Assignment: Do Three CARS Passages Individually, Under Timed Conditions

"If you don't build your dream, someone else will hire you to help them build theirs."
– Dhirubhai Ambani

Day 19 – CARS Question Types: Author Technique

Today, we finish up our question types! I know it's truly been a lot to take in, but if you take your time and review this material, it will pay off, I promise. Keep up your three passages a day, but from here on out, take all three at once back to back. So for example, if passage 1 has 5 questions, passage 2 has 6, and passage 3 has 7, set your clock for 31.5 minutes, and then take all 3 passages at once. This will allow you to develop your ability to intuitively spend less time on easier questions and passages and spend more time on the harder ones. Remember what the "right" pace feels like though. Don't waste your time on hard questions. Mark them and come back!

<u>The Author Technique Question Type:</u>

Author Technique questions aren't all that common on the CARs. They make up roughly 5% of the questions, so you'll see somewhere around 2 to 3 on your test. I'd come back to these towards the end of your preparations if you don't feel you have a firm grasp on the other question types, but mastery of the *Author Technique* type will nonetheless give you points on test day, and every point counts in terms of getting you closer to that 129+

At base, the *Author Technique* question is asking you a "Why" question, but in a narrower and more restricted sense than in a *Main Idea* question. With *Main Idea* questions, you're asking yourself "why did the author write this passage?" With *Author Technique* questions you're asking yourself, "Why did the author include this example or that paragraph?" You're looking for the purpose or motivation behind a particular part of the passage, not the motivation for the entire passage itself.

One of the best ways to answer *Author Technique* questions is to ask yourself what would be lost from the passage in general or in the author's central argument in particular without the part of the passage you're being asked about? What would be missing? If you're able to identify that, you've found your answer. Remember that while every passage has a central purpose, so too do each of the paragraphs that make up the passage. Ask yourself, "Why did the author write this particular paragraph? Why not leave it out?" You can even do this with sentences within paragraphs. CARS passages are kind of like those Russian Nesting Dolls with each smaller unit having a purpose all its own.

The author includes the fact that the Pentagon was unable to account for "what it received in return for paying out $2.3 trillion to various suppliers" in order to:

The author probably mentions that "space exploration was not only a triumph of lone individuals but also of bureaucracies, institutions, and a political system" in order:

The author uses the term "sense" in the passage in order to:

The author provides the information that "Bhutan decided to use 'Gross National Happiness' as their explicit policy goal rather than Gross National Product (GNP)" in order to:

What is the author's apparent purpose in mentioning astronomy?

When the author says that "Russian nesting dolls are much cooler than was originally thought," she is emphasizing the fact that:

Tips for Author Technique Questions:

– Remember that you're looking for the purpose behind something particular the author said in the passage. Your answer is going to be significantly more narrow than the answer to a *Main Idea* question would be.

– Ask yourself "Why did the author include this part? What would be missing or lacking if it weren't there?" If you can answer these two questions, you will find the correct answer.

– Remove the information you're being asked about from the passage in your head and see what happens. Does the passage fall apart? Is one aspect of an argument weaker? Is a key point less clear? In answering this question, you'll discover why the author wrote what she wrote.

– Eliminate answer choices that are too broad or don't sync with the overall tenor of the passage. Out of nowhere answer choices are pretty common with these types of questions, so keep an eye out for them!

And there you are! You're done with Question types on the CARS section. Every kind of question the CARS will throw at you on test day is right here: you've seen them all. Usually, student's feel overwhelmed when taking a look at the question types. There are so many tips to remember. I recommend taking the types in order as presented here, as they've been presented in terms of frequency and conceptual importance. Also, keep an eye out for the types of questions you consistently miss on your practice passages. If a certain type of question keeps fooling you up, spend a little time rereading that question type's post. We'll spend the next two days looking at two different formats the CARS can use to ask questions. Remember to do all three of your passages in a block today.

Today's Assignment: Do Three CARS Passages Consecutively, Under Timed Conditions

"Preparation is 90% of success. Do the work and the results will follow."
– Anonymous

Day 20 – CARS Question Formats: Negation Questions

So we are just about done with our exhaustive survey of question types and formats on the CARS. Today, we start a two-day mini-series on the different ways the CARS can ask any of the particular question types. There are three basic types, the standard question, the negation format question, and the roman numeral format question. Up to this point, all our discussions concerning question types have been with standard format questions.

Today we'll focus on negation questions and tomorrow we'll take a look at the roman numeral question format. While on the surface, including the word "NOT" in the question stem should not add that much to the difficulty of the question, but the number of negation questions missed by MCATers on test day is astounding. These are the questions you beat yourself up for when reviewing your practice test. Negation questions are the playground for stupid mistakes waiting to happen. We're going to learn how to save yourself that headache!

<u>*The Negation Question Format:*</u>

The Negation question format is not a particular type of question but is instead a way of asking a question. Thus, you could have a *Main Idea* or *Passage Detail* question asked in a Roman Numeral format, a *Negation* format, or in a *Standard*, straightforward format as you've seen throughout the question type series up to this point. The most tricky of the three for the majority of students is the *Negation* question.

The question stem of a *Negation* format will ask you to select which answer choice negates this or that thing in the passage, argument, or particular idea of the author. Usually, on the CARS, you're looking for the positive response to a question, whereas on negation questions, you're taking the position of the "glass half empty" type. This is a difficult switch for many test takers to make, especially when 49 or 50 of the questions you'll complete on the CARS will be positive in nature. When a negation question comes up, spend a little extra time to get comfortable with the change in perspective. It'll save you an incorrect answer.

Let's take a look at a few examples.

1) The passage suggests that O'Ryan and Anderson would most likely endorse the following military policies EXCEPT:

A) The invasion of a neighboring nation due to an unavoidable shortage of water in one's own country.
B) The military seizure of land known to contain large oil fields.
C) A national budget that increases military spending that is on par and would exceed the military budgets of all neighboring countries.
D) The blockade of a neighboring country's rubber exports due to a severe decline in their own country's primary financial export, rubber.

2) Suppose that many comparative literary scholars believed that their discipline has broadened itself too much and should narrow its identity. This new information would most CHALLENGE the author's claim that:

A) Comparative literary studies should broaden its understanding of what it considers under its domain.
B) Comparative literary studies' cross-disciplinary approach is not the modus operandi of most intellectual work.
C) The field of comparative literary studies does not do anything, but instead is a tool to be used.
D) Comparative literary studies are a subset of little programs whose wisdom has already been integrated by most academic departments.

3) Which of the following discoveries would be most TROUBLESOME regarding the author's description of the development of linguistics?

A) Early grammarians were known to compare notes with grammarians of other languages.
B) Most philologists never compared languages outside of those of antiquity.
C) Linguistics encompasses both intra-language analysis and inter-language analysis.
D) An essential component of modern linguistics is understanding correct and incorrect usage within a language.

Let's start with the first question. This is the hardest version of the *Negation* question because it starts you moving in one direction and then at the last moment fakes you out and asks you the exact opposite. Notice how up until the very last word you think you'll be looking for the answer that the author would most likely endorse. Now few students will miss the word EXCEPT. They'll read it, but then in the hustle of running through the answer choices, going back to the passage, and thinking about which medical school they'd like to get into, they'll forget the word EXCEPT. Then they'll see an answer choice that looks great, and is absolutely something the author would endorse and...wham! They miss the question because they forgot the word EXCEPT. I can't tell you how many times I've been reviewing practice tests with students, and they go "Oh NOOOO! I can't believe I missed that one; I just misread the question stem. I knew the answer!" Those are sad moments indeed because they would have gotten the question right if they had slowed down and paid a little more attention. I have two strategies that you can use to immediately safeguard yourself against such silly mistakes.

1) Whenever you see an all capitalized word in a question stem, write that all capitalized word on your scratch paper, in capital letters, and then draw a box around it. I can't tell you how many times on my own practice tests this saved me from selecting the wrong answer. By taking time to write the word down, you engrave the correct version of the question into your brain, and it also gives you a back-up check at the end of the question, as you'll remember, "Oh yeah, this is a *negation* question. Did I read it right?"

2) Rephrase the negation part of the question to make it simpler. For some negation questions, it makes a world of difference (as is the case for question 1). For others, it doesn't have as much of an effect, but can still be helpful (questions 2 and 3) Let's try this with each of our example questions.

a. For Question 1, instead of "would most likely endorse the following military policies EXCEPT: rephrase it as "*would most likely REJECT which of the following:*" This is so much simpler, as you clearly know you're looking for the one the author would <u>reject</u>, not all the ones she <u>would endorse EXCEPT</u>.

b. For Question 2, try "Which answer choice is most weakened?"

c. For Question 3, try "Which discovery would hurt the author's arguments the most?"

Be sure to keep an eye out for capitalized words in the question stems. It's always a good idea to pause for a moment when you see such a word in order to make sure you truly understand what the question is asking you. I'd say at least a quarter of the questions students miss on the CARS is not because they don't have the capacity to answer the questions correctly, but because they don't actually understand what the questions are asking. Slow down on these questions!

Ok, that's it for today. Tomorrow, we finish up all this talking of question types and formats, and then we turn our attention to what makes wrong answer choices wrong, and how the CARS comes up with them. Don't forget to do your three passages today!

Today's Assignment: Do Three CARS Passages Consecutively, Under Timed Conditions

"Action is the foundational key to all success."
– Pablo Picass0

Day 21 – CARS Question Format: Roman Numeral Questions

Yesterday, we looked at the negation question format. Today, we take up the one remaining question format that tends to throw MCATers off, the Roman Numeral question format. Once you get the hang of these question types, you'll look forward to seeing this questions on your practice tests. Let's get to it!

<u>*Roman Numeral Questions:*</u>

It isn't necessary to spend too much time on *Roman Numeral* questions in particular because they can be any one of the previous question types we've reviewed. With that said, there are some tricks you can pick up to make this particular format easier. So we'll review a few different strategies you can use to your benefit. Let's take a look at an example question below.

1) According to the passage, the value of subjective measures are:

I – Their ability to measure QOL more accurately.
II – Their ability to show which factors are actually important.
III – Their use of self-reflective reporting.

A) I Only
B) II Only
C) I and II Only
D) II and III Only

With *Roman Numeral* questions, the hardest part is finding the information you need to evaluate the individual statements. It is not uncommon for these sorts of questions to require you to synthesize different parts of the passage in order to decide whether one or more of the statements are true. These sorts of questions lend themselves to the global approach of a main idea question, even if the question is asking about something in particular. Look to see which parts of the passage connect with which statement. If you cannot find a connection between the two, regardless of what type of question it is, then the statement cannot be correct.

Let's take a look at the best approach for dealing with this format:

– Which statement do you start with? Always evaluate statements in the order of the frequency in which they appear in the answer choices. This way you get the most bang for your buck.

– You don't have to evaluate every statement. For example, if you determined that statements I and II are correct, you don't even need to read statement III, let alone determine if it's correct or not. Don't waste time!

– If you're stuck between picking an answer choice that has all statements being correct and only two of the three being correct and you've decided to guess, pick the latter, as it is a more difficult question if two out of the three statements are correct than one where all three are correct.

That's it! Great job! You made it through all the different question types and formats! We're going to spend the next few days looking at what makes wrong answers wrong, and how the MCAT writers come up with their trickster answer choices. I'll explain more about it tomorrow. Today's a break day, so get out and go for a walk or meet up with a friend. No practice passages today, but tomorrow we ramp up to 4 passages a day!

Today's Assignment: Take a break! Don't do any practice passages today.

Attachments

Argumentation Handout.pdf
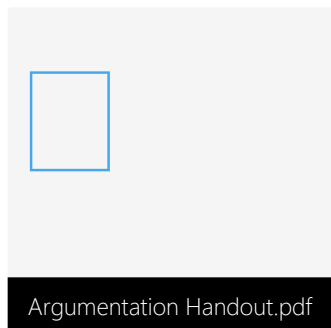
Day 22 – CARS Answer Pathologies: Part I

Finally, something new! Today, we start our Answer Pathologies mini-series. Each day I'll take you through a few of the MCAT's favorite ways to come up with incorrect answer choices. With every question on the MCAT you get incorrect you've made two mistakes. You've missed the correct answer, and you've been tricked by a wrong one. We'll be taking a look at this latter aspect over the next few days with the hopes of getting you to a place where you can eliminate one, two, or sometimes even three of the four answer choices just based on knowing the basics of what makes a wrong answer wrong. You should up your daily passage to four from here on ou.! Let's get to it!

<u>The Too(s):</u>

So one thing to keep in mind with all of these answer types is that it is difficult to see them in action without actually doing practice passages and questions. Every answer choice on our practice tests has the type of answer choice outlined and explained in detail. So if you're looking to put the lessons of these next few days into action, our practice tests are designed for you to zoom in on the particular answer pathologies that trip you up the most.

There are three types of "Too" answer pathologies on the CARS. There are answers choices that are *too narrow* in scope, *too broad* in scope and *too extreme* in modality. Learning how to recognize each will pay off big time come test day. Let's take a closer look at each.

> **Too Narrow** – *Too Narrow* answer choices are some of the most common incorrect answer choices on the MCAT. They are extremely easy to come up with because the test takers simply look to the passage and select a narrowly focused paragraph or idea and present it as the main idea of the passage. A good example of this might be a main idea question about Pablo Picasso's general approach to art, but a *Too Narrow* answer choice would focus on the one paragraph in the passage that is concerned with Picasso's blue period. To make the blue period the main idea of the passage would be to have an answer choice that is far too narrow to be correct. If you find yourself with an answer choice that seems to leave out or forgets about majors parts of the passage, be weary. This is probably a *too narrow* answer choice.

> **Too Broad** – *Too Broad* answer choices are the opposite of the *Too Narrow* type. In this case, the passage has a more centralized focus than the answer choice implies. If we take the example of the passage about Pablo Picasso's general approach to art, a *Too Broad* answer choice might be something that surveys all of 20th-century art. This answer choice is far too large in scope to accurately depict the focus of the passage. Broad answer choices are usually easier to notice because they are too general. General questions almost always have general answers on the CARS, but sometimes you might say to yourself, "Hey, this answer choice is too general." If that's the case, you've got a *too broad* answer choice. Mark it out!

> **Too Extreme** – *Too extreme* answer choices take the author's position and by the insertion of an extreme modal qualifier amp up the author's point to such a degree that it becomes unsupported, and as a result, becomes wrong. Take a close look back at Day 7 to get these keywords down. You'll be looking for words such as "always," "never," "rarely," and the like. Extreme answer choices are particularly difficult because they look familiar and often use information from the passage. They become wrong by the insertion of unsupported modalities of strength or weakness. This is why developing an eye for modal qualifiers can pay major dividends come test day. Make sure that an answer choice is not only something that the author thinks but that it is also strengthened to the proper degree.

That's it for today! Be on the lookout for these three answer types in your daily passages. Once you complete this guide, use the included practice test to identify which answer pathologies trip you up the most. The rest of our practice tests break every answer choice down in exactly the same way so you can easily determine which give you the most trouble. Keep up the hard work! You're doing great. Don't forget your four passages for today.

Today's Assignment: Do Four CARS Passages Consecutively, Under Timed Conditions

"I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."
– Thomas A. Edison

Day 23 – CARS Answer Pathologies: Part II

Today we continue with our CARS Incorrect Answer pathologies. We're trying to understand what makes a wrong answer wrong and accordingly, a right answer right. If you can learn to think like a test writer and learn the ways they come up with the incorrect answers choices on the CARS; you'll be much better prepared to see their tricks come test day.

Yesterday, we looked at the "Too(s)" which are answer choices that take information in the passage and make it "Too Narrow," "Too Broad," or "Too Extreme" to be the correct answer choice. Today, we're going to continue along similar lines by taking a look at a few others ways passage information can be hijacked and used to trick you. Also, you should have upped your daily passage count to four yesterday. By now your timing should be on track, and you should begin to start spending more time reviewing your practice passages. In a few days, we'll spend some time on how to best review your passages.

The "Um...No" Category:

Our first two answer types for today, I call the "Um...No's" because they're kind of like when someone does something obviously wrong and think they're getting away with it by being slick, and you are very tempted to look them in the eye and just say, "Um...No. That's not going to work."

   Out of Context – The *Out of Context* answer type is tricky, because if you've read the passage carefully, you will recognize the information provided. It sounds familiar; it might even use some of the author's own language. It might even have the "feel" of a correct answer choice. The problem is that the answer choice takes information from one part of the passage out of its appropriate context and shoves it into a new situation that it doesn't apply to. Some of the easiest examples of this can be seen when a question asks about something the author brings up in paragraph four, but the answer choice deals with an idea from paragraph one. While it isn't always true that this is going to be a wrong answer, generally speaking, ideas separated by that much text on the CARS are not directly connected, and it's likely that the information is being taken out of context. Be on the lookout and make sure that your answer choice actually answers the question you're being asked and still applies to the particular context of the question.

Irrelevant– The *Irrelevant* answer type is related to the out of context type in that they are usually connected to the passage in clear ways. The language might be the same as the passage, and the answer choice may well be an accurate description of something the author says in the passage. But the answer is wrong. Why? Because the information may be completely irrelevant to the question at hand. This is a good opportunity to remember that just because an answer choice on the CARS is true, does not make it correct.

Whereas the *Out of Context* type takes information out of it's appropriate context and applies it to a new situation, the *Irrelevant* answer type simply has no proper connection or relevancy at all to the question you're being asked. The information in the answer choice may well be true, and it may be located near the pertinent information relating to the question, but the answer choice in and of itself has no relevancy and does not in any way even begin to answer the question. These answer types are very common on hard questions which leave students confused. After a few minutes of struggling with a question, many students breakdown and select the answer choice containing information that looks and sounds familiar, even if they can't figure out how it relates to the question. Don't be fooled!

The "Over the head" Category:

These trickster answer types are based on a fundamental breakdown of understanding in terms of what's going on in the passage. It's like that hand motion when you swoop over your head and say, that's just over his head. These answer choices rely heavily on minor breakdowns of understanding. If you see the most common ways they try to trick you; you'll be better prepared when reading and answering questions to see these types coming.

Opposite – The *opposite* answer choice is one of the easiest to spot on the CARS if you understood the passage and what the author's point was. The *opposite* answer choice simply takes an argument or belief of the author and provides the opposite. Thus, if the author believed states' rights were detrimental to the Union, the opposite answer choice would argue that the author believed that state's rights were useful and/or beneficial. Now with clear arguments and beliefs such as the one I just referenced, it's hard to believe that anyone could ever be fooled by such a thing, but with highly nuanced arguments, it can be easy to insert a simple "not" into the answer choice to turn everything around and yet still have the same look and feel as what the author says in the passage. Make sure the answer choice is actually saying what you think it is saying and that it actually lines up with what the author believes.

Contradiction – The *contradiction* answer choice is another easy trickster to spot on the CARS if you've done your job when it comes to reading the passage. This answer choice will simply contradict a key point or idea of the author. Its trickiness lies in its resemblance to something the author says, and if you're not clear on what the author believes, it can be easy to find a well-worded counter-point convincing without even realizing what you're doing. Try to simplify the answer choice and the author's argument or point and ask yourself, do these two things line up or do they contradict each other?

Misunderstanding – The *misunderstanding* answer choice does exactly what you'd expect it to do, it relies heavily on common misunderstandings or misreadings of the passage. The AAMC has tested these passages with hundreds of students, so they know the ways in which particularly difficult arguments or ideas are misunderstood. If a misunderstanding shows up enough on their research, they turn it into a wrong answer choice. These are some of the hardest answers to eliminate if you don't understand what you just read in the passage because they seem to be correct or at the least they seem not to be incorrect. Your best bet with trying to improve with misunderstanding types is to strengthen your passage reading abilities to make sure you're correctly breaking down the author's arguments and correctly understanding what she's getting at in her "Main Idea." Working on these two points alone will pay huge dividends come test day. Go back to Day 11 and review the steps of "Painting your Way to the Main Idea."

Ok, that's it for today. You're almost there and then you'll have all the tools for getting that 129+ on the CARS you need to go to the school you want! Remember, from here on out do four passages a day! Have a question? Ask it here and we'll get back to you!

Today's Assignment: Do Four CARS Passages Consecutively, Under Timed Conditions

"One important key to success is self-confidence. An important key to self-confidence is preparation."
– Arthur Ashe

Day 24 – CARS Answer Pathologies: Part III

Welcome to the final day of CARS Answer Pathologies. Hopefully, you've started to see a few of these different answer pathologies popping up in your practice passages. It takes time to get the hang of seeing them consistently, so don't be too hard on yourself if it takes some time. As with most things, it takes time to get better. Today, we finish up answer pathologies and then we're going to move on to how to review your practice tests/passages tomorrow. Keep up the hard work!

<u>The "Almost...but Not Quite" Category:</u>

The "Almost...but Not Quite" category is one of the MCAT's favorite ways to make an answer choice wrong. The reason these are so irresistible is that they are almost the right answer! They've got just about everything they need to answer the question correctly, and yet, they're not quite right. If you're running low on energy or confused by the question or passage, these types of answer choices are going to look very attractive. Be careful, as you'll usually have an uneasy feeling deep in your gut about them, because you sense something is off (because something is off), but you can't quite put your finger on it. Evaluate the entire answer. Is it all right? Is all the necessary information there?

> ***Incomplete*** – This is the MCAT's second most common trickster answer choice. They give you 70% of the correct answer. It's so close to getting the job done, but it just doesn't quite get there. These answers are very difficult as you have to truly know what the correct answer is to recognize that these types of answer choices are wrong. This is why making a prediction before looking at the answer choices can be so effective as you have a good idea of what you'll be looking for. If an answer choice doesn't cover all of the material it needs to in order to answer the question correctly, you'll see it. If you don't have a prediction, you might gloss over what's missing. Another way to see an incomplete answer choice is to recognize that it shares a lot in common with another answer choice. The MCAT will write out what the correct answer is, remove some of the critical information, and then serve it up to you as a correct answer choice. WARNING: The incomplete answer choice might actually be a longer answer choice than the correct one. We're not talking about word count here; we're talking about the necessary information to correctly answer the question. Don't be tricked by long answer choices.

Half-Right – The *Half-Right* answer type is particularly difficult because it is right, except it's not. These answer choices get everything right, and then they throw in a piece of information that is wrong or unsupported. There are a few different ways the MCAT can do this. They'll give you a correct answer with some information, thesis, or argument that is supported by the passage, but then they'll also give you something that isn't, thus you'll have a "Half-Right/Not Supported" answer choice. Or they'll give you a "Half-Right/Misunderstanding" or a "Half-Right/ Contradicted" answer choice. You're probably starting to get the idea. They can make the part that makes the answer choice wrong any one of the other answer pathologies types we've talked about so far. The key to remember is that on the CARS, the saying "Half-wrong all wrong" is your motto. If something, anything is wrong about the answer choice, the entire answer choice is wrong. Every word in an answer choice must be correct, or the answer choice is incorrect. The MCAT loves to do this to test takers. They write out a very good answer to the question and then add on some information that contradicts the passage, misunderstands the author, or is just outright not supported by the passage. Lazy or imprecise test takers will focus on what's right about an answer choice and ignore what's wrong. This is what they're expecting you to do. Don't do it!

The "Where'd that Come From?" Category:

Probably the most common trickster answer category would be the "Where'd that Come From?" answer type. This category introduces information that seems to come from nowhere, or at least not from the passage with the hopes of intimidating you. The MCAT knows how much is riding on this test for you. They know how stressed out you are (because everyone is!), and because of this, they try to play on those feelings of insecurity and anxiety. Being a doctor is stressful. It is one of the highest stakes professions out there. You can't mess up and when you do, someone often gets hurt. The key to the MCAT CARS in general, and in particular to this answer type is CONFIDENCE. Trust yourself. Trust your training. Trust that you know what you're doing. Confidence is critical on the CARS. Make sure you have it.

Not Supported – This the single most common trickster type on the CARS. The answer choice will sound good. It will seem to answer the question, but there's one little problem, the answer choice isn't supported by the passage. There's no mention of it in the passage, or it isn't a point the author makes. It sounds so good, but it isn't supported. The worst type in this category is an answer choice that the author would seem to be likely to support, but if you just don't know, if you can't be certain, if it isn't a justified implication of the passage, you can't choose that answer choice. You just can't. Ask yourself on these types of answer choices, is this supported by the passage, or is this just an answer that sounds good?

Another version of the *Not Supported* answer choice is the "*Where the hell did that come from*?" type. This is where the CARS gives you an answer choice that seems to be from out of nowhere.

Where did that come from? Why are they even talking about this? Did I miss something? Of crap, I missed something. I suck. I'm awful. I've got to reread the entire passage. I'm not getting into medical school because I have no idea why they're bringing up Renaissance art when the passage was about mid-western agricultural practices at the turn of the century...NOOOO!

You see how this thought spiral goes. This is exactly the response the MCAT wants you to have. Don't do it. You've read the passage thoroughly. You've been practicing for months. Have confidence. If something seems off, if the answer choice seems to be coming from out of left field, mark it wrong. If the answer choice doesn't seem to pertain to the passage, eliminate it like you're eliminating someone off the bachelor or bachelorette. No rose for this answer choice. Being confident on the CARS is key!

Outside Knowledge – The MCAT knows that you're probably a very smart person. Compared to the general population, you're probably reasonably well read and have a general level of awareness about a variety of issues and subject matter. Thus, they're safe in assuming that you've probably read or thought about some of the topics of the passages in the past. So what can they do to turn that against you? Exactly, give you an answer choice that uses against you the potential outside knowledge you might have about the passage. I remember taking a practice AAMC MCAT and reading a passage that I had just read in a book for a class not, three months previous. I knew exactly where the passage was in the book and had done very well on the paper I wrote reviewing that particular topic. I bombed the passage! It was one of my worst. Why? 1) I didn't read the passage carefully because I assumed I knew everything. 2) I answered the questions based on what I knew about the book and the topic in general, not what the passage said. Remember that on the CARS, the MCAT assumes that you have no knowledge whatsoever about the topic, so every single question is based on the passage or something that can be inferred from the passage. There were actually questions on that passage I took that I answered incorrectly because the MCAT expected me to answer based on the passage, not based on what I knew the author's actual opinion to be in general. Thus, in this case, the correct answer was actually false, considering I knew who the author was and his true position. The moral of the story is: Don't use outside knowledge on the CARS...EVER!

Ok, that's it for today. Make sure to do your four passages today. As you may be gearing up to transition to taking full-lengths pretty soon, tomorrow, we're going to go over the correct way to take a CARS test. Keep up your hard work. It's going to pay off. It's already paying off; you just have to keep coming back and doing the work.

Today's Assignment: Do Four CARS Passages Consecutively, Under Timed Conditions

"Success is a state of mind. If you want success, start thinking of yourself as a success."
– Dr. Joyce Brothers

Attachments

Day 24 - Practice Passage I...
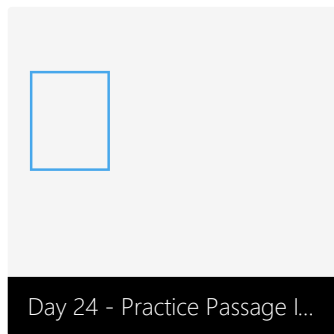
Day 25 – How to Take a CARS Practice Test

So, we've done quite a bit over these last few weeks to build your CARS intuition in terms of pacing, how to read and break-down CARS passages, and the kinds of questions and answer choices you'll face on test day. Some of what I've suggested has been good for practicing but isn't the best for when you're actually taking the actual MCAT on test day or when you are taking your practice exams. Today, I'm going to review the key points in how to approach taking a full-length CARS practice test. You can download a summary tip sheet on how to take a CARS test here. I recommend printing it off and keeping it by you for your first few full-lengths so you can easily reference it to make sure you're remembering all the tips we've given you. You shouldn't even think about taking a full-length CARS practice test if your timing isn't solid.

Here's a list of the key strategy points for actually taking a CARS Practice Test.

- **Take three breaths before every passage**.

- **Do the passages in order.** Do not read the questions before the passages.

- **Do not take notes on the passages or use the highlighting tool,** *except* in the rarest of cases, such as to note a particular position, idea, or key term. Taking notes or highlighting distracts you from the flow of the passage and will break up your reading rate. Furthermore, you want to be developing your ability to understand the passage in a holistic way. If half of your ideas about the passage are written down, a quarter are highlighted in the passage, and the remaining quarter is in your head, you'll literally be all over the place. Don't do it. Wean yourself off note taking and passage highlighting. One or two per passage max and zero is preferred.

- **Mark hard questions!** I mentioned this strategy early in the series, but I'll mention it again. The first time you have the thought, "Hey I'm spending a lot of time on this question" look at the clock and give yourself 30 more seconds. In those 30 seconds, eliminate any answer choices you can. After 30 seconds, mark the question, make a guess and say to yourself "I'll come back to this once I get the easy ones." Remember the only question that will keep you out of medical school is the one you spend too much time on.

- When you have your pacing down, you should be **spending only 3 to 4 minutes reading the passage**. If you are taking much more time than that to read a passage, you need to do more individual passages, as your pacing isn't where it should be to actually take a full CARS test. This will leave you roughly a minute per question.

- Only voluntarily look at the clock 1 time! I know this is so hard for test takers, but it's really the best way to do it. Look at the clock after you finish the 6th passage. You should have close to 35 minutes left. If you don't, it's time to speed up. Don't wait until your last passage to try and make up for lost time. You'll barely notice shaving off a minute from each of your remaining passages, but try and take three minutes off your last passage, and you'll probably miss at least half the questions. **Look at the clock after you finish the 6th passage, you should have 35 minutes left.**

- You should continue to push yourself on your practice tests and passages. Just because you've got your pacing down doesn't mean you can rest. The best MCATers actually take the CARS slightly faster than the pace we've been training at. It's easier to shave off those last few minutes, so that's why I set the goals I do for you early on, but now that you've got those down, it's time to push yourself. Your goal should try to **finish your first pass of the CARS section by the 5-minute warning, giving you plenty of time to go back to the questions you marked.**

- After you finish your first pass of the CARS section (hopefully by the 5-minute warning mark) before going to your marked questions, **click the review button and make sure you have an answer choice selected for every question.** When I was taking my AAMC practice tests, on three different tests, I had accidentally not selected an answer even though I had done the question. Don't let this happen to you!

Sometimes timing problems come up despite our best preparations. I know for me, despite doing many practice tests and working very hard to perfect my timing, on test day, I took probably 20% longer per passage than I usually did. I felt like I couldn't trust myself because this was the real thing. I spent more time rereading and double checking than usual. Luckily, I had trained myself to do the CARS passages faster than I needed to, so even with my taking more time, my pacing was in the sweet spot. What happens though if you took too long on your first 4 or 5 passages and are now staring down 4 or 5 passages with not enough time left?

The first step is to stop and take three deep breaths. Many students will realize their dire situation, panic, and then burn through 10 questions in 10 minutes without thinking before they then settle down and finish the rest of the test. Right there in those 10 minutes, they've ruined their MCAT, because they likely missed 6 or 7 out of those 10 questions. Don't do this. Calm yourself. Focus on your breath. This will take 10 or 15 seconds at most, but will be worth a great deal more if you prevent a major meltdown. It's the best possible way to spend those first 10 or 15 seconds.

The second step is to pick up your pace now, not later. Many students will continue along with their normal pacing for the next two or three passages hoping their situation will miraculously change. They then get to the 8th passage and realize that nothing has changed and are then forced to speed through the last two. This doesn't work either for the same reason that the 10 questions in 10 minutes panic doesn't work. You cannot rush that many questions and expect to do well. So what do you do? Well first, you've got to accept your situation. You're behind on time. You're going to miss more questions than you would have. You're not going to be able to do the rest of the CARS section like you would have otherwise. You're going to have to pick up the pace slightly, so your best bet is to pick up the pace on the passage in front of you. Push yourself now and catch up on time. Read only the first sentence of every paragraph and then move on to the questions. Answer these questions the best you can, marking all of them as you go. This will be the first passage you come back to if you have time at the end of the test, but even if you don't have time, at least you gave yourself a fighting chance on these questions because of the rough outline you constructed by reading the first sentences of each passage. This is so much better than just randomly guessing, especially if you've developed some sense of the wrong answer pathologies we've already discussed.

On the next passage, read only the first and last sentences of each paragraph and then move on to the questions. You're not going to feel like you know enough to answer the questions well, but you will probably still get somewhere around 60% to 70% correct which is a lot better than 30% or 40% of the 10 questions in the 10 minutes panic. Plus, you give yourself the possibility of coming back if you have time.

If you do this for your first two passages post-panic, you will likely be back on track for your last two or three passages. Still push yourself through these last few passages, but approach them like you would normal passages under normal timed conditions. Hopefully, you'll finish early and have time to go back to one of the two rushed passages and pick up another couple of points, but even if you can't, your timing crisis will likely only cost you 2 to 4 questions instead of 6 to 8, this can be the difference between scoring a 127 and a 124.

Finally, unless you're answering the questions of the 9th passage (I said answering the questions, not reading the 9th passage), no matter what you're doing or how close you are to answering the question in front of you or finishing the passage you're currently reading, at the five minute warning, stop whatever you're doing and go through the rest of the test and mark a guess for each answer choice. I've had students who got so absorbed in what they were doing after the 5-minute warning that they ended up leaving the last passage blank because they ran out of time. There is no excuse for this.

So a ceiling tile falls and hits you on the head, you panic and vomit on your keyboard, you realize you aren't wearing pants, or worse that you haven't worn pants since beginning your studying for the MCAT. If any of the above occur, it's time to void. If on any section of the MCAT, you feel like you had a breakdown on 3 or 4 passages or had to out and out guess on a significant number of questions (8+) you really want to consider voiding. These kinds of catastrophic breakdowns make scoring even an average score very difficult to nearly impossible. If you have one of the above occur to you on test day, your chances of scoring in the 505+ range are very low. I know having to void your MCAT is discouraging, but it's better to take the MCAT when you're prepared than to put the extra pressure on yourself of having a bad score on the books. Don't consider voiding until you complete a section. Then after you've gotten through the section and time has expired, stop and calm yourself down. Then decide whether or not you're going to void based on your performance in that section. Don't have a wait and see approach of "Well, maybe I'll do better on the other sections." It's very difficult to evaluate how you're doing on the MCAT while you're taking the MCAT besides knowing if you're bombing. The worst thing that could happen is that you bomb a section, feel like you did well on another section to make up for it and then decide not to void at the end of the test because you over estimated how well you did on your bombed section. Then scores are released, and you're devastated at your low score. Don't let this happen to you. Make the void decision immediately after the section you're worried about.

This is the one thing I do not understand about many premeds who take the MCAT with the mentality that if they don't do well, they can always take it again. There is a great deal wrong with this approach. First, nearly all admissions committees in the US take previous MCAT scores into account when evaluating your application. Old scores may not count for as much as new scores, but if you've got two applicants who each scored 512 and have similar applications, but one got a 500 on his first attempt, who do you think they're going to pick for the last slot? Second, and this is by far more important, the MCAT is already an incredibly high stakes test. If you didn't do well on your first time attempt, YOU HAVE to do well on your second if you want to stand any chance of getting in. There really aren't third chances when it comes to the MCAT or med school admissions. I think I've only heard of one or two cases in my many years involved with MCAT prep when students taking the MCAT a 3rd time matriculated. Don't put that kind of pressure on yourself. Don't sit for the MCAT if you're not ready Don't sit for the MCAT if you haven't scored within 2 or 3 points of the lowest composite score you'd be happy with two weeks out from your test date. If you haven't, it's time to push the date back, look at which parts of your studying plan didn't work, and then get to back to the grind. It will suck right now, but five years from now, you won't even remember.

Think of a reschedule as a low 1st attempt. It didn't work out, so you've got to start again, however, this time, you've got the advantage of all the studying you did up until that point. The moral of the story is "don't rush taking the MCAT."

There's a great thread about not rushing to take the MCAT here on SDN. If your test day is approaching and you're thinking about rescheduling or if you're thinking of biting off a little bit too much while studying, I highly recommend you read the thread.

We're almost done. Keep it up! Want a summary tip sheet of today's post? Download it here! Don't forget to do your four passages today! See you tomorrow!

Today's Assignment: Do Five CARS Passages Consecutively, Under Timed Conditions

"Nothing tastes better than knowing there was nothing more you could have done. Leave nothing on the table."
– Anonymous

Day 26 – How to Review a CARS Passage

Ok, so you've been reading all of these posts about how to read CARS passages and how to recognize the different question types and answer pathologies. You've been taking a ton of CARS passages. Your timing is down, and you've got your pacing just right. What do you do to push yourself up that last little bit to get in the 129+ range? The final key is mastering how to review your practice tests. I'm going to break the process down into the three pieces of the CARS section, the passages, questions, and answer choices, and then in our final review post, I'll bring it all together. Today, we look at reviewing the passages. Don't worry if this seems a lot to take in especially since we're breaking it up over three days.

On Day 29, I provide a complete overview of how to correctly review a CARS test. I also include a "How to Review a Practice Test" summary sheet you can download. If you want to be ahead of the game, you can download it here.

The Why of Reviewing:

The goals of reviewing a CARS passage are very different than those of reviewing a passage from one of the other sections. In "studying" for the CARS, what we're actually doing is "practicing" doing things the right way over and over again. Doing this allows you to habituate doing the right things which translate into success on test day. In reviewing a passage, we're trying to develop our CARS "skills." This is our only goal, so keep that in mind whenever you review anything on the CARS. You're not trying to learn. You're trying to develop a particular skill set!

How to Review a Passage:

Hopefully, you've been doing the keyword review for some time now. If the keywords are starting to jump out at you as you take the passages under testing conditions, you've achieved our goal in doing the exercise, so it's time to move on to more advanced techniques. What do we do now? There are six steps I recommend for reviewing CARS practice passages:

Step 1: Wait at least four hours to review your practice test!

Step 2: Read the passage once through at a normal CARS pace, but without any reference to time. Slow down when you need to.

Step 3: Determine what kind of passage it is: *Argumentative* or *Descriptive*?

Step 4: Read the passage again, but this time, after each paragraph, write on a sheet of paper a one sentence summary of the paragraph. Do this for each paragraph.

Step 5: After completing step 4 for all of the paragraphs, paint yourself to the main idea.
    a. What's the frame?
    b. What's the subject?
    c. What's the point?
       (See Day 11 if you have questions on how to do this)

Step 6: After completing steps 1 through 5, write a one-sentence summary of the entire passage. Reviewing your passages like this will allow you to most effectively review the corresponding questions and answer choices, and it will also get you in the habit of summarizing passages and paragraphs in your mind. The ability to summarize efficiently and thoroughly is one that must be developed over time. By doing these five steps repeatedly, over time, you'll begin to do them without even thinking about it in real time while taking your test. When you get to this stage, you'll see huge jumps in your score.

***TIP –** To make your review even more productive, when you're taking the passage under test conditions, if there is a part of the passage that doesn't make sense or confuses you, highlight it or make a note on scratch paper reminding you as why it was confusing or hard. Going back to these sections later when you're reviewing your test is a useful way of improving your reading comprehension.

That's it for today. M*ake sure you do your five passages today. Review each passage as we've described above. I've created a passage review handout that makes it easy to remember which questions to ask yourself as your review a passage. You can download it here. Tomorrow we'll go over how to review questions which is slightly more involved. Keep up the hard work. The finish line is in sight!*

Today's Assignment: Do Five CARS Passages Consecutively, Under Timed Conditions

"Failure will never overtake me if my determination to succeed is strong enough."
– Dr. Og Mandino

Day 27 – How to Review CARS Questions

Yesterday, we looked at how to break down and review a CARS passage. I recommend you review every passage you do from here on out like we did yesterday. Today, we're going to look at how to review CARS questions. If you've got your timing down and your reading comprehension is strong, what we'll cover today is the most important step in getting you to the 129+ range. If you've made it this far in terms of mastering what we've covered thus far, you've come a long way, and you're in the top tier of MCATers. Congrats!

If you want to get ahead, and have the full "How to Review a Practice Test" summary sheet, you can download it here.

<u>*The Why of Reviewing:*</u>

I'll just say it again here to remind you and drill this lesson home. We don't review CARS passages to learn anything. We review CARS passages in order to build good habits and to see where our CARS process is breaking down.

The first step of effective question reviewing begins when you're actually taking your practice test. I recommend that if you are not at least 75% sure you've answered a question correctly that you mark that question to review later, regardless of whether you get it wrong or right. If it's confusing you, there's a reason it's confusing you, and that reason is your key to improving your CARS score.

So mark a question for review later if:

- You can't eliminate at least two answer choices

- You aren't at 75% sure that you've answered a question write

- You are spending a lot of time on a question

- You have no idea what the answer is

- You mark the question in order to come back to it later in the test.

This technique will save you a lot of time in when you review your practice tests, as you'll only review your "trouble" questions and the ones you got wrong. You won't waste time on the ones you knew you were going to get correct (and that you did get correct). As your CARS skills improve, you'll only be reviewing 5 to 10 questions per test max. Which isn't that many.

Step 1: Wait at least four hours to review your CARS practice tests.

We recommend you grade your practice test right after you take it, but only mark down which questions you got wrong. DO NOT mark the correct answer or review the answer explanations! Try and move quickly so you don't remember the correct answer to questions you missed. If you do, this will hamper your review later on.

Step 2: Make a list of all the questions you got wrong or that you marked as "trouble" while taking the test.

For each question...

Step 3: Identify what kind of question type you're dealing with.

Step 4: Paraphrase the question, and try to put it into as simple of language as possible. What is the question really asking you?

The MCAT is notorious for making easy questions hard by disguising them in complicated language. If you're able to learn how to look past all of that extra junk, you'll find your CARS practice tests getting easier every day. So much of the CARS is simply learning how to translate.

Step 5: Using your paraphrase, write down an answer prediction in as few of words as possible.

This won't be possible with every question, but with many it will be.

And that's it for reviewing question stems. The final piece of your review is to actually dig into the answer choices which we'll go over tomorrow!

Remember to do your four practice passages for today and be sure to review each of the passages and questions as we've learned. It might be uncomfortable at first and take more time than you'd like, but 1) you will get faster the more you review and 2) besides getting your timing down, reviewing practice tests is the biggest opportunity to improve. At the end of this three-day mini-series, I'll explain how to review an entire practice test, putting all of the pieces together.

Today's Assignment: Do Five CARS Passages Consecutively, Under Timed Conditions

"There are no shortcuts to any place worth going."
– Helen Keller

Day 28 – How to Review CARS Answers

We are almost there! Think about how much ground you've covered over these last 27 days. It has not been easy, and it's taken a lot of work, but you've made so much progress. You've taken one of the hardest sections on the MCAT and turned it into one of your strengths! Keep up the intensity and finish strong. Today we learn how to review the different answer types.

If you want to get ahead, and have the full "How to Review a Practice Test" summary sheet, you can download it here.

<u>*How to Review CARS Answers:*</u>

Reviewing CARS answers is fairly straight forward. I know it looks like a lot of steps, but it's actually not that complicated.

Step 1: Wait at least four hours to review your CARS practice tests.

We recommend you grade your practice test right after you take it, but only mark down which questions you got wrong. DO NOT mark the correct answer or review the answer explanations! Try and move quickly so you don't remember the correct answer to questions you missed.

Step 2: Only review questions that you either missed or marked as giving you trouble.

Step 3: Using your prediction from the last step of the question review, consider each of the answer choices and see if there are any that are obviously incorrect.

Eliminate these answer choices, and on your scrap paper write down next to the letter in as few of words as possible why this answer choice is wrong. (Skip this step if you weren't able to make a prediction.)

Step 4: With the remaining answer choices, go back to the main idea sentence you wrote during your passage review and see if this helps you eliminate any of the answer choices.

Write down on your scrap paper next to the letter why the answer choice is wrong. Don't get bogged down in the passage details, but try to identify the parts of the answer choice that manifest the traits of an incorrect answer, as this will help you in the future.

Step 5: If you still have any answer choices remaining, go paragraph by paragraph reading the one sentence summaries you wrote during the passage review, seeing if you're able to eliminate any answer choices.

Write down why the answers are wrong if you do eliminate some.

Step 6: If you still have any answer choices that are stumping you, now it's time to go to the answer explanations and see what's going on.

After reading the explanations, determine which type of answer choice each of the remaining answer choices is.

Step 7: After reading the answer explanation, write a sentence or two as to what makes the correct answer right, and also why any incorrect answers you were unable to eliminate are wrong.

Step 8: Finally, if you're still stumped, and you've purchased our practice tests, you can leave your question on our questions forums on SDN, and one of our test writers will respond as soon as possible to help.

Great job today. I know reviewing practice tests is one of the most boring aspects of MCAT prep, but it also pays the biggest dividends! Take your time. You should spend at least as long reviewing a CARS test as you spent taking it (so at least 90 minutes). Early on, especially when you're missing and marking more questions than you will later, it may take more time. If your timing is down, and you're doing a decent number of practice passages a week (roughly around 30 passages a week for the last six weeks of study), then there really isn't a better way for you to spend your free time than reviewing practice passages (At least in terms of MCAT!). Keep up the hard work. Enjoy your break day today!

Today's Assignment: Take a break! Don't do any practice passages today.

"Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time."
– Thomas A. Edison

Day 29 – Putting it All Together: How to Review an Entire CARS Practice Test

Today is going to be an easy to follow summary of the last three posts, so you have a comprehensive guide that breaks down how to review your practice tests, step by step. You can download a PDF guide here that you can print off and keep close by to walk you through each of the steps.

We've also taken the time to develop a Review Fill in Sheet that allows you to write out these various steps in a particular logical order. You can download the Passage Review Worksheets here which you should fill out as you review each passage.

Steps to Take Right After you Finish A Practice Test:

Step 1: Score your answers, marking down all questions you got wrong as well as those you marked as having troubled you. BUT *DO NOT LOOK AT THE CORRECT ANSWERS OR ANSWER EXPLANATIONS!*

Step 2: Put away the test and do something unrelated to CARS for at least *four* hours. It's ok to study other MCAT materials, but take a break before getting back to studying.

Reviewing the Passage:

Step 3: Starting with Passage 1, reread the passage at your CARS pace, but without reference to time. It's ok to slow down on difficult sections.

Step 4: Determine what kind of passage it is: *Argumentative* or *Descriptive?*

Step 5: Read the passage again, but this time, after every paragraph, write a brief one sentence summary. A few words are enough.

Step 6: Next formulate the main idea of the passage by writing out the frame, the subject, and the point of the passage.

See Day 11 if you have questions about how to do this.

Step 7: Write a one-sentence summary of the entire passage.

Reviewing the Question Stem:

Step 8: Identify what kind of question type you're dealing with.

Step 9: Paraphrase the question, trying to put it into as simple of language as possible.

Step 10: Write down an answer prediction in as few of words as possible.

This won't be possible with every question but with many it will be.

Reviewing the Answer Choices:

Step 11: With your prediction in hand, review each answer choice and see which you are able to eliminate as incorrect.

For any answer choices you eliminate, briefly write down what makes that answer choice wrong.

Step 12: With any remaining answer choices, go back to the main idea sentence you wrote earlier and see which answer choices you are able to eliminate. For any answer choices you eliminate, briefly write down what makes that answer choice wrong.

Step 13: With any remaining answer choices, read through your paragraph summaries and see which answer choices you are able to eliminate. For any answer choices you eliminate, briefly write down what makes that answer choice wrong.

Step 14: If any answer choices remain, go to the answer explanation and see what you missed. For any remaining choices answers, briefly write down what makes them wrong.

Step 15: Once you have eliminated all incorrect answers choices and written down why they are wrong, briefly write down what makes the correct answer choice correct.

Repeat this process for every question you miss or marked as troubling you while taking the test. After reviewing Passage 1, repeat this process for Passage 2, proceeding through all 9 passages.

Once you have your timing down, reviewing your passages is the surest way to improve your CARS score, so that is why we've spent so much time going step by step through the process. Hopefully, today's post has given you a global look at the best way to review your practice tests. As you read through it, I know it seems like a lot of steps, but it isn't actually all that difficult once you do it a couple of times. You can download an easy, step by step PDF guide here and also our passage review worksheets we recommend you fill out as your review. I can't recommend it enough that you print off the passage review worksheets and fill it in as you review your passages.

Writing it down forces you to focus and organizes your thinking in a way you wouldn't do otherwise. Great job today. Only one more day. We're going to step up the passage count to 6 passages for the last two days because you'll be taking full-lengths soon and we want to make sure you're ready!

Today's Assignment: Do Six CARS Passages Consecutively, Under Timed Conditions

"Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time."
– Thomas A. Edison

Once you have your timing down, reviewing your passages is the surest way to improve your CARS score, so that is why we've spent so much time going step by step through the process. Hopefully, today's post has given you a global look at the best way to review your practice tests. As you read through it, I know it seems like a lot of steps, but it isn't actually all that difficult once you do it a couple of times. You can download an easy, step by step PDF guide here and also our passage review worksheets we recommend you fill out as your review. I can't recommend it enough that you print off the passage review worksheets and fill it in as you review your passages.

Writing it down forces you to focus and organizes your thinking in a way you wouldn't do otherwise. Great job today. Only one more day. We're going to step up the passage count to 6 passages for the last two days because you'll be taking full-lengths soon and we want to make sure you're ready!

Today's Assignment: Do Six CARS Passages Consecutively, Under Timed Conditions

"Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time."
– Thomas A. Edison

Day 30 – Advanced Study Techniques

Finally, the last day is here! Congratulations. By spending a little bit of time each day doing passages and working on these strategies, you've been slowly investing in your CARS score in a way that cramming just doesn't allow you to do. The material you've covered over the last 30 days is enough to get you to the score you want on the CARS if you're willing to put in the time. With that said, there are a few advanced study techniques that I've come across for those wanting to achieve an ultra-high (read Ivy League) CARS score on test day.

Today, we're going to look at two advanced techniques I recommend to my students that are designed to train your brain how to think like a test writer, breakdown passages the way they do and see the ways the AAMC writes it's questions. Don't worry about this technique if your timing isn't down, or if you are short on time in your study schedule. Most people aren't going to need it to get the score they want, but if you're shooting for the 95 percentile or higher on the CARS, you'll want to give this one a try. Don't forget about your four passages today!

Exercise 1# - Hunting for Clues:

One of the craziest things about the MCAT CARS section is that the passages don't seem to matter as much as one would think. One of my favorite things to do is to have my classes rip a passage out of their books and then just try and answer the questions correctly based on the clues given in the question stems alone. Surprisingly, most students score *only slightly lower* than they usually do despite not having read the passage. Sometimes, you have to get a little inventive and not every thought you have is going to be correct nor justified, but nonetheless, more often than not, question stems and your conjecture about them will offer you clues that are useful in answering the question if you're paying attention. The following exercise is meant to show you how much information you can squeeze out of the question stems by simply paying close attention and by practicing "*Hunting for Clues*." Let's practice a little bit with an exercise.

Take a look at each of these question stems from one of our passages. Get a piece of scrap paper and with each question stem write out what information if any you can garner to use to answer the questions. I'll include what I got out of the question stems at the end of the post.

1) According to the passage, the "Greek Experience" has what value to the modern world?

2) The author of the passage states that "Hence death is no longer 'loss' in the usual sense. It no more refers to the things we lost but to our 'loss.'" The author is most likely referring to:

3) The passage indicates that its author would NOT agree with which of the following statements?

4) If the author of this passage believed that history was cyclical and was likely to repeat itself, this belief would be most DISCREPANT with which aspect of the passage?

5) Which of the following activities would the author be most likely to describe as WASTE?

Getting Better at Hunting:

Hunting for clues in question stems is one of the hardest CARS skills to develop. This is a very advanced skill, and you shouldn't even begin to think about it if your timing isn't rock solid (*rock solid means you easily get through reading the passage and answering the questions without feeling rushed*). With that said, developing this skill will really up your percentage correct. So how can you practice? Give the *Question Sprint* a try.

The *Question Sprint* has four steps:

1) Get some crappy verbal reasoning passages. I think this is the perfect way to use *Kaplan*'s verbal reasoning passages and practice tests. They are by far the worst material (save Gold Standard verbal) and you really shouldn't waste your time practicing with them...EXCEPT for using them on the *Question Sprint*. You can pick up Kaplan's *MCAT Verbal Reasoning Strategy and Practice* for around $10 and it includes something like five or six practice tests. For any of you taking a Kaplan course, I strongly recommend you ignore everything they tell you about the CARS and look elsewhere for your practice and strategy. You can use their material for the *Question Sprint*, but I wouldn't recommend using it for anything else. Another possible resource is Berkeley Review's Verbal Reasoning Passages. Their passages are significantly better than Kaplan's, but still not up to the standards of Exam Krackers, The Princeton Review, or...Testing Solutions :) (*Please ignore shameless self-promotion*)

2) Set your clock for 20 Minutes and Start!

3) Don't read the passages! Read the question stems and answer choices and based solely on the information provided in the two, try to answer as many questions correctly as you can. You have to take this seriously. You will receive no benefit if you don't try your hardest to get the questions right. You've got to look for clues and construct an image of what the passage is about. Look at the answer choices and see what pathologies you are able to identify and eliminate those answer choices.

4) After 20 minutes, go back and mark your questions right or wrong. Don't bother reading the explanations. Notice that if you **had** to have the passage to answer a question correctly in every case, you should only get 25% correct, the same percentage as randomly guessing. But most test takers get anywhere from 40% up to 60% correct. This obviously shows that there is a lot of information packed into the question stems and answer choices that you can use to your advantage. Keep track of your percentages correct as a motivation to try and improve over time.

I recommend you do the *Question Sprint* every other day or two, but **do not do it** if your timing is not solid and **do not do it** if it is going to cut into other MCAT studying. This is an advanced practice technique and is not necessary to do well on the CARS.

Answers to Hunting for Clues:

Ok, so we're going to go through each question stem from up above and see what clues there are that can help us get to the correct answer.

1) According to the passage, the "Greek Experience" has what value to the modern world?

So we know that we're going to be comparing something having to do with "Greek Experience" and the modern world. Via this contrast, we can assume that "Greek Experience" is not referencing modern Greece and that "Greek Experience" is not identical to the modern world, as if they were the same thing, one could not contribute something to the other. The way the question is worded implies that there is a connection between the two and that this connection might not necessarily be intuitive and may even be surprising. Based on this question stem alone, you know that the passage is arguing that "Greek Experience" has something to contribute to the modern world. Because of the use of the term "value" it is reasonable to infer that this contribution is something positive (as nearly all contributions are), so be on the lookout for a connection that is positive and potentially surprising or unexpected.

2) The author of the passage states that "Hence death is no longer 'loss' in the usual sense. It no more refers to the things we lost but to our 'loss.'" The author is most likely referring to:

Based on this question stem, we know that the passage deals with death and loss. From the previous question stem, we learned that we were comparing ancient Greece and the modern world in some way, so this question stem would seem to imply a difference in an understanding of loss or death in ancient Greece that has since changed. It would seem that this question will hang on an answer choice that shows death or loss in ancient Greece in one light and contrast that with how death or loss is considered now. The word "Hence" is a great temporal keyword setting up a now vs. then dichotomy. Knowing your keywords will make these sorts of clues jump out.

3) The passage indicates that its author would NOT agree with which of the following statements?

This is too general of a question stem. There aren't any clues here.

4) If the author of this passage believed that history was cyclical and was likely to repeat itself, this belief would be most DISCREPANT with which aspect of the passage?

This question stem tells us a few things. The first is that based on the passage, it is not clear that the author of the passage believes that history is cyclical, and is actually likely to believe the opposite. If it were clear, there would be no need to include the word "If." Second, there is something in the passage that conflicts with the idea of cyclical nature of history or said another way, the return of the past to the present. In thinking back to question stem 2, it could be that the Greeks believed that in loss or death the thing which was lost may come back in the future whereas the modern view is that once it is lost, it is lost forever. Or maybe the relationship is reversed, which is to say it was the Greeks who believed that something lost was forever lost. Look for the contrast and what significance the notion of a cyclical approach to history would have. Which position, that of the Greeks or of the modern world would most align?

5) Which of the following activities would the author be most likely to describe as WASTE?

There aren't too many clues here except to say that in order for you to be able to answer this question correctly, the author must take a clear position on a particular issue or set of issues that can then be applied to a new situation. Thus, the passage is likely to be an argumentative one. Beyond that, you'll have to look at the answer choices.

As you see, you can't expect to score a 129+ without reading the passages, but it is surprising how much information you can get from the question stems if you're paying attention. If you're interested to see how well your clue finding matched up to the passage these questions were drawn from, I've attached the passage in full at the end of this post.

Are you curious? You can download the passage these questions were taken from here!

Hunt for clues in the question stem and answer choices! *As you review your practice passages, take a moment and write down anything you're able to come up with based on the question stem and answer choices alone. What information does it give you or imply? Spend way more time and energy on this step than you think you should. You'll be surprised how good you get at this over time and how much it will pay off!*

Thinking Like a Test Writer:

One of the best things I ever did for developing my CARS skills was to write questions for passages. I stumbled onto this idea when I was studying for my own MCAT and was experimenting with ways to hone my verbal/CARS skills. I decided one day to take a passage from one of the verbal books I was using and to write five of my own questions, answer choices, and explanations for why the correct answer was right and the wrong answers were wrong. I know this seems like a lot of work, and it is, but doing this only a couple of times a week produced incredible results. I was able to anticipate possible questions as I read through the passages and began to think like a test writer. It was another one of those Matrix moments I referenced earlier in this series. In fact, after I finished my MCAT, it was this exercise in part that gave me the idea to start Testing Solutions, as I had gotten so good at writing questions and breakdown passages.

Here's what you do:

Step 1: Find a passage

Step 2: Use our list of question types and examples (included in this post)

Step 3: Select 3 to 5 question stems and use those examples as a basis for writing your own questions, answer choices, and answer explanations

***Tip - One way to make this even more useful is to find a study buddy. Each of you writes 3 to 5 questions for the passage and then swap your question sets, do them, and then discuss the questions, answer choices, and explanations afterward.

It's amazing how quickly you'll begin to think like a test writer if you do this exercise. It takes about an hour or so if you do it right, but if you do this 4 or 5, you'll start to develop a sense of how the test writers think. I've included examples of the different question types below.

Question Types and Examples:

Implication:

The author implies that George Washington is NOT:

The author says "As the boat began to sink, the cowards began to run towards the life rafts," but also "many gentlemen proceeded to help the women and children into the rafts while remaining on the doomed ship." These beliefs imply:

The passage implies that the difference between World War I and World War II was primarily one of:

Implicit in the statement "Philosophers are often derided by the masses but nonetheless are necessary for the proper functioning of society" is the idea that:

Regarding the concept of food insecurity, the author implies:

What does the author imply regarding the relationship between those who own capital and those who do not?

Inference:

Based on the author's treatment of the US's counter-terrorism strategies, it is reasonable to infer which of the following?

It is reasonable to conclude that the author believes what about George Washington Jr?

Which of the following inferences is most justified based on the author's arguments concerning the enfranchisement of women in the early 20th century?

Campbell's argument that Star Wars is an example of a mythological journey allows for which of the following inferences?

A reasonable supposition from the passage concerning the primary problem that plagues most philosophers is that:

Apparently, both sides participating in the debate assume that:

According to one of the positions presented, government is an "affair of invention and contrivance" and is supremely concerned with questions "of means and end." If both of these premises are true, which conclusion is most reasonable?

Application:

The author would be most likely to AGREE with which of the following positions?

It was determined that most first year Ph.D. candidates cry during class at least once. The author would most likely respond to this new information by:

Suppose that most pirates did not want to be a pirate when they were young children. Based on the passage, the author would be most likely argue in response to this:

Which of the following budget proposals would the author be most likely to support?

The author would be most OPPOSED to which of the following assumptions commonly made about pirates?

If the author is correct concerning the development of social norms in early human societies, the most likely consequence of the author's position in regards to early childhood development would be:

Which of the following situations would the author most likely characterize as similar to the economic conditions that led to the economic downturn of 2008?

Integration of New Information:

Suppose that a modern classics scholar stated that although Aristophanes' primary goal was to make people laugh, he did have a latent political agenda and thoroughly believed that everyone ought to engage in political action. If this scholar's statement were found to be true, what would be the effect on the author's central thesis?

A manuscript of Dante was discovered which showed that he did not believe in a literal hell. How would this new information affect the author's claims?

Which of the following findings would most weaken the author's argument?

Suppose that De Francesco prided himself on the clarity and accessibility of his poetry. Which of the following claims made by the author would most be called into question?

According to one authority on constitutional government, "the individual is the primary and foundational unit of a constitutional government." This authority would probably:

Suppose that a survey of successful modern leaders finds that some study history while others do not. The author would most likely respond to this challenge by saying:

In recent years, foreign intervention has led to the establishment of democracies in a range of nations across the world. The argument presented for government being understood as a product of natural history suggests that this would:

Passage Detail:

The author states that Picasso believed that:

According to the passage, the American Revolutionary War was fought in order to:

The passage suggests which of the following concerning the impact of educational reforms enacted by Reagan?

The author believes all of the following EXCEPT:

Based on the discussion in paragraph three, Rodin's approach to sculpture was widely regards as:

Which of the following claims does the author NOT make in the passage?

Which of the following assertions most closely resembles the author's beliefs concerning the role of the Federal Reserve in the modern US economy?

Main Idea:

The main idea of this passage is:

The author's central argument is:

The central thesis of this passage is that:

The author most likely wrote this passage in order to:

Which of the following best characterizes the main idea of the passage?

What is the author's central concern?

The author can best be viewed a proponent of:

The intended audience of this passage is most likely:

Meaning of a Term:

As used in the passage, "aphrodisiac" refers to:

Which of the following phrases is most synonymous with the way in which the author uses the term "hairy" in his claim that "August 24th was a day full of hairy situations."

The author's use of the term "glad-handed" most likely means:

In paragraph four, what is the author's most likely intended meaning in writing that Queen Elizabeth is crusty?

Author Technique:

The author includes the fact that the Pentagon was unable to account for "what it received in return for paying out $2.3 trillion to various suppliers" in order to:

The author probably mentions that "space exploration was not only a triumph of lone individuals but also of bureaucracies, institutions, and a political system" in order:

The author users the term "sense" in the passage in order to:

The author provides the information that "Bhutan decided to use 'Gross National Happiness' as their explicit policy goal rather than Gross National Product (GNP)" in order to:

What is the author's apparent purpose in mentioning astronomy?

When the author says that "Russian nesting dolls are much cooler than was originally thought," she is emphasizing the fact that:

You can download a PDF summary of all the question types including question stem examples here!

And that's it! 30 Days of CARS. You've done it! Now all that there is left for you to do are practice passages. If you've set yourself up for the 90 day schedule, you're 60 days out from test day. You've been slowly building your capacity to do more and more passages at the correct pacing, and now you've got all the strategies you need to do well on test day. You can download a PDF of the question types here! Thanks for reading through this guide and best of luck on all your MCAT testing! If you have any questions or just want to say hello, leave a post on this guide's forum here at SDN!

Today's Assignment: Do Six CARS Passages Consecutively, Under Timed Conditions

"Enter every activity without giving mental recognition to the possibility of defeat. Concentrate on your strengths, instead of your weaknesses... on your powers, instead of your problems."
–Paul J. Meyer