

20 Tips to Help You Succeed on Your Admission Exam

1. **Determine which exam is needed:** For many health professional programs there is only one admission exam to complete. For example, the DAT is the admission exam to complete for dental schools. However, Physician Assistant programs may accept scores from the GRE or the MCAT or not require any admission exam at all (rarer). Be sure to know what your specific target schools accept, require or prefer. Links to many of the common admission exams can be found on the last page of this document.
2. **Investigate past score ranges and any current minimum scores:** Once you know which exam you are focused on, visit your target schools' admission websites looking for information about any current minimum score(s) required and past score ranges. This can help you begin to develop your exam score goals. This information can appear in different places on different school websites. It could appear in the prerequisite text, in the FAQ or in Class Profiles (snapshot statistics of previously accepted students). This information may also be found in summary references such as: the [Medical School Admission Requirements](#) (MSAR) text – for MD programs, the [Osteopathic Medical College Information Book](#) (CIB) – for DO programs and the [ADEA Official Guide to Dental Schools](#).

As you set your goals strive to have your scores fall within the ranges of previously accepted applicant scores and as far above any minimum score requirements as possible. Not all schools list minimum scores, but for those that do these minimums can be a cutoff point. Schools always receive more applications than they have seats. An easy way to reduce the applicant pool early on is to deny applicants who don't meet minimum requirements including admission score minimums. Keep this in mind as you make your application decisions.

3. **Learn the policies associated with your specific exam including scheduling details:** Each admission exam can have it's own set of policies. It is important to review the details associated with your planned exam. Consider learning the answer to questions like these: How often is the exam offered – throughout the year or only a couple of times per calendar year? How many times can you take the exam? When and how can you schedule or reschedule? Does the cost vary depending upon when you register? Are testing accommodations possible (extended time, separate room, etc.) Are there any fee assistance programs? Often times this information can be found in an exam guide or directly from the official exam website – see the last page of this handout for links.
4. **Understand your application cycle:** Application cycles for different programs open during different times of the year. Since many programs use rolling admissions, it is important to know when your specific application cycle opens. Rolling admissions means applicants are considered for admission on a first-in, first-completed basis. So it is to your advantage to have your application completed earlier in the cycle. A good "rule of thumb" is to have ALL your application materials (including exam scores) available to admission committees within a month of the opening of the cycle, but be sure to consider your particular situation. If you apply late in the cycle (even if it is technically before a school's printed application deadline), it may be too late for you to realistically be considered.
5. **Set a realistic exam preparation timeline:** Since your application will not be considered complete without exam scores, it is important for you to time your exam scores to be available before or when the rest of your application has been received by schools. Admission committees will place an application "on hold" until ALL pieces of the application are available. For these reasons, it is important for

you to investigate how long it takes for official exam scores to be forwarded to your schools. For some exams this can take as little as two weeks once the exam is completed, but for other exams like the MCAT this window of time can be as long as 30-35 days.

Once you know how long it takes for official scores to arrive you can then work backwards to determine when you should begin preparing. How much time is needed to prepare for an admission exam depends upon many factors including what background/experience a student already has and which exam is being taken. You should know though many students study 2-3 months for the GRE and 4 months or more for exams with more science content like the DAT, MCAT, OAT and PCAT.

6. Investigate what content is covered and plan to complete appropriate coursework

BEFORE taking your exam: Most of the admission exams required by health professional schools (except the GRE), will expect knowledge in basic science courses like Biology and Chemistry. Physics is covered on some, but not all of these admission exams. The DAT and PCAT currently do not cover Physics topics although Physics courses can be required by both dental and pharmacy schools.

Be sure you know what topics are covered on your admission exam and what associated courses address this content. Then develop a plan to not only complete all appropriate coursework BEFORE taking your admission exam, but to also understand the information you are learning. More and more admission exams are expecting students to not just regurgitate information they have learned, but to apply information they have learned in new ways.

It is also surprising how many students elect courses such as Physiology and Biochemistry after their exam is completed when they really would have benefited from electing these courses before their admission exam. So, be sure to review the official exam website and consult with your adviser(s) as you sequence your coursework.

7. Consider how you learn best: We all have different learning styles. For example, some of us are primarily visual learners while others are auditory learners or perhaps a combination of one or more learning styles. Some of us enjoy learning in groups while others prefer to study on their own. Are you self-motivated to consistently study each day or would you benefit from a more structured learning environment that a test prep course can offer? Would you benefit from having a “study buddy” to help keep you on track? Think about your learning style(s) and what learning environments have worked for you in the past as you consider your test prep options.

8. Investigate your exam preparation options: Test preparation options can vary widely. Options can include: simply studying a test preparation book on your own, attending shorter preparation webinars or workshops, taking longer test preparation courses or even signing up for private one on one tutoring sessions. As you explore these options, think about factors like: benefits, time commitment, online versus in-person, cost and which may be the best fit for you and why? Be sure to also inquire if a test prep company is currently offering any promotions, discounts or payment plan options. In addition to learning about content will the option(s) you choose teach you time saving and test taking strategies as well?

No matter which option(s) you choose, don't forget to take advantage of the free sample questions and information you can find on the official exam websites or at sites like <https://www.khanacademy.org/>. It is always a good idea too to use more than one preparation resource. This way you are more likely to be exposed to questions of different levels of difficulty.

9. Create a list of questions to ask test prep companies: Before committing to take a test preparation course, consider asking the following questions:

- Does the course focus on content, strategies or a combination of both?
- Do their programs match your learning style and availability?
- Will you benefit from the structure of taking a prep course?
- How much contact will you have with instructors and in what way (online/in-person)?

- How long do you have access to the course materials and practice tests?
- Will you still have access if you need to retake a course?
- What is/are the cost/payment options?
- Can they connect you with previous satisfied customers?

10. **Ask others you trust what has worked for them or other students:** Besides asking test preparation companies for references, consider asking others whose opinion you trust for test prep recommendations. Your friends, peers, mentors or advisers may have helpful suggestions. Upperclassmen can be especially helpful to ask because they are usually “a few steps ahead” of where you currently are. Be sure to ask both what has worked and what has been less successful. Since we all learn differently though, make sure to also independently investigate your options before committing to a particular plan.

11. **Make sure you put in enough time and consistently work your plan:** Preparing for an admission exam is a process where consistent effort over time is more likely to lead to success. Don’t underestimate the amount of time this preparation takes. Preparing for an exam like the DAT or MCAT can take as much time as electing a full term regular science class. So, if you plan to prepare for your admission exam at the same time you will be electing other courses you need to plan carefully. Don’t take on too many courses at once or be involved in so many other activities that your admission exam preparation doesn’t happen. It is also better for most students to study initially for shorter periods of time, but consistently rather than to hold “marathon-like” sessions less frequently.

No matter what way you choose to prepare there are NO SHORTCUTS. **You need to put in ENOUGH TIME and EFFORT to be successful on your admission exam!**

12. **Understand the risks of repeating an exam:** Admission exams for graduate health professional schools are viewed differently than the ACT or SAT. Except for possibly the GRE, you should assume admission committees can view all your attempts. So there is always some risk in having similar or lower scores especially if a student attempts to repeat an exam too quickly before s/he has adequately addressed what needed to be strengthened first. Admission committees look for upwards trends and a student to learn from his/her previous experience. Repeating an exam and receiving similar or lower scores can be viewed negatively. Sometimes too a student will focus so much on one section that even if s/he improves in this area, another exam section will be lower resulting in no significant net overall score improvement.

For these reasons, it is best to plan to take your admission exam once when you are most prepared and repeat an exam only after consulting with advisers and/or some of your target schools. If you do need to retake an exam, make sure to thoroughly assess what happened, what you can do differently and give yourself enough time to make a significant improved difference.

13. **Take enough full-length practice exams:** It’s not enough to just understand the information. These admission exams can last for hours, especially the new MCAT which has a total content time of over 6 hours and a total seat time (including breaks) of about 7.5 hours. Ask yourself – have you ever taken an exam as long as the admission exam you are planning to take? Being successful on these exams also relies on having your “timing down” and having plenty of stamina so you don’t wear out and lose your focus long before the exam is over. Taking as many full-length practice exams in the weeks before your actual exam date is a great way to build stamina, learn what you still need to work on and refine your timing. Strive to take as many full-length exams as you can simulating the exam day conditions as closely as possible.

14. **Assess if you are ready:** In the end, you are the best judge of whether or not you are ready for your admission exam. Have you put in the time you had planned? Do you feel confident and prepared? Have

you consistently had practice scores ABOVE where you would like to be on the actual day? If not, then perhaps you need to keep working on this/these area(s) since most students report that they often score slightly lower on the official exam compared to how they were scoring on their practice exams. Have you completed enough full-length practice exams? If you are satisfied with your answers to questions like these, then you are ready. If not, then consider the points discussed below.

15. **Be willing to alter your exam date and application timing if you're not ready:** Many things can throw off even the best preparation plans – a significant life event, illness, increased need to work or simply other unexpected additional time commitments. If you cannot confidently answer the questions listed above and you do not feel ready to take your admission exam, you should consider rescheduling your date. Don't "just take the exam anyways" because of the risks associated with repeating these professional admission exams. Keep in mind too that admission committees will expect your admission exam scores to "match" your GPA. If you are not ready for your exam, it is better to reschedule to a future date when you will be more fully prepared. However, you will also need to consider how this might affect rolling admissions and which year you end up applying. Consult with your advisers as needed.
16. **Know where you are going, but plan extra time:** Hopefully you have been able to schedule your exam locally and know exactly where you need to go and how long it should take you to get there. Regardless, it's always a good idea to take a practice drive at the same time on another day to more accurately assess how much travel time is needed. This practice run can help you judge traffic flow, consider alternate routes if needed and help you plan parking. Use this information and then add in some extra travel time just in case. Visiting the testing site in advance and allotting extra time should give you one less thing to worry about.
17. **Be well rested and have a backup alarm:** Although difficult to do, it will be very important for you to be as well rested as possible for days leading up to your actual testing date. Having plenty of prior rest will help improve your focus and stamina during the long admission exam day. Consider also setting aside time the day before your exam for an activity that relaxes you. The morning of your exam, have a backup alarm plan to make sure you rise at the time you intended.
18. **Be confident the day of the exam and do your best to avoid being distracted:** Don't underestimate the importance of positive psychology. Olympic and professional athletes often succeed because they remain focused and believe they will succeed. By the morning of exam day, have confidence in all your preparation and your abilities. Do what you need to do to be confident and believe that you will be successful! Make it a positive, self-fulfilling prophecy. During the exam, focus on your efforts and do your best to block out any distractions that may be occurring around you.
19. **Understand how to void your score if needed:** Despite careful planning, occasionally something happens the day of the exam and a student knows the results will not reflect his/her best effort. Spend time in advance learning if your admission exam has a mechanism for voiding your scores on exam day. Then you will know what to do the day if you feel it is really necessary to void your scores. Understand once you make this decision though and act upon it, it is not reversible – so be very sure this is the best thing for you to do. Also check other exam policies; some exam services may still count a voided score as an exam attempt for the year even if no scores are reported to schools.
20. **Remember, exam scores are only one component of a complete application:** Although an important factor, keep in mind that test scores are only one component of a complete application. Admission success depends upon many other factors like: coursework, GPAs, letters of evaluation, personal statement and essays, health care observation and volunteering, community service, interviewing and more. Strive to be as strong as possible in all areas BEFORE applying.

ADMISSION EXAM RESOURCES:

Links to COMMON ADMISSION EXAMS for Health Professional Programs

- **DAT (Dental Admission Test)** is required by Dental Schools.
 - Home link . . . <http://www.ada.org/en/education-careers/dental-admission-test/>
 - See <http://www.ada.org/en/education-careers/dental-admission-test/dat-guide> for the topics covered on the DAT.
- **GRE (Graduate Record Exam)** can be required by: Public Health, Physician Assistant, Physical Therapy, some Nursing and Veterinary Medicine programs.
 - Home link . . . <http://www.ets.org/gre>
 - See http://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/about/content/ for the topics covered on the GRE.
 - Sample questions . . . http://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/prepare/powerprep2
- **MCAT (Medical College Admission Test)** is required by: Allopathic (MD) and Osteopathic (DO), Podiatric Medical Schools, and accepted by some Veterinary Medical Schools. **MCAT is a NEW exam in 2015!**
 - Home link . . . <https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/taking-mcat-exam/>
(Be sure to review the MCAT Essentials)
 - See <https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/article/whats-mcat-exam/> for topics covered on this NEW exam.
 - Prep . . . <https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/taking-mcat-exam/prepare-mcat-exam/>
- **OAT (Optometry Admission Test)** is required by Optometry Schools.
 - Home link for the <http://www.ada.org/en/oat>
 - See <http://www.ada.org/en/oat/guide> for the topics covered on the OAT.
- **PCAT (Pharmacy Admission Test)** is required by Pharmacy Schools.
 - Home link for the <http://pcatweb.info/>
 - See http://pcatweb.info/downloads/CIB_MNL_FNL_on-line.pdf for the topics covered on the PCAT.

Links to TEST PREPARATION COMPANIES

As you review the links below, keep in mind Pre-Professional Advising at Oakland University does NOT recommend any particular test preparation method or company over another . . . Carefully consider your own unique situation and ALL the different options available to you before making your decision on how best to prepare for your admission exam.

- **Examkrackers** . . . <https://www.examkrackers.com/>
- **Kaplan Test Prep** . . . <http://www.kaptest.com/>
- **The Princeton Review** . . . <http://www.princetonreview.com/>
- **M Prep** (Online option for MCAT prep only) . . . <http://www.mcatquestion.com/ecourse.php>
- **Khan Academy** (For MCAT 2015 and a variety of subjects) . . . <https://www.khanacademy.org/>
- Also consider free questions that may be available directly on the official admission exam sites above.