



4 Tips to Ace the MCAT CARS Section

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For me, CARS was always the most challenging part of the MCAT and consistently my lowest score on practice exams. I was never a fast reader, so I initially struggled to read through all the passages and ended up having to guess on the last few questions. However, when I was preparing to take the MCAT for the second time, I discovered invaluable and simple strategies that worked for me. Here are 4 tips that helped me get a 131 on the MCAT CARS section.

1. Read something every day

For my second MCAT attempt, I began reading articles from *The Economist* and *The New York Times* about diverse topics from politics to real estate. I also made sure to read different types of articles, such as news and opinion pieces. For every article that I read, I made sure to summarize key themes and the author's main message. I read something every day for at least 45 minutes starting 6 months before my MCAT. As I read more articles, I realized that both my reading speed and comprehension were improving. Reading every day is one of the simplest and most effective things you can do to increase your CARS score. Remember to select passages that are reasonably complex in order to mimic the level of difficulty you will see on exam day.

2. Do practice questions under timed conditions

While reading is an excellent way to increase your CARS score, nothing can replace doing practice questions. Personally, I mostly used questions from the AAMC, including full length practice exams and CARS question packs. I did try questions from Examcrackers, but to me the questions were not representative of the actual MCAT. It is crucial to do questions under timed conditions (about 10 minutes per passage and its respective questions). I began by doing 1 passage each day and gradually increased the number of passages to a full-length CARS section. Practicing under timed conditions will help you to read faster and be more efficient. For me, I found that spending about 4 minutes reading and 6 minutes answering questions worked well. For practice questions that you answer incorrectly, make sure to thoroughly review why you got it incorrect and the AAMC's logic for the right answer.



3. Focus on the main idea, but don't ignore details

Many CARS passages will include an array of details that are difficult to memorize. Make sure not to get bogged down in the minutiae and focus on the authors' tone and main message. This strategy will help you eliminate lots of choices when answering questions. Some questions will also ask you to extrapolate your understanding of the author's perspective and predict how they would respond to a similar issue or situation. When you have a strong grasp of the main message of a passage, it will become much easier to answer these types of questions. However, you are almost guaranteed to get asked about specific details too. Highlighting facts like names, dates, and the order of events helped me to appropriately refer to the passage when I was asked about a specific point. Some people believe that highlighting wastes time, but it worked wonders for me.

4. Do things that help clear your mind

I cannot stress this enough. One of the most important factors that helped me get through complex (and often dry) CARS passages was developing a clear mind. This way I was not distracted when reading passages or letting negative thoughts get in the way of my studying. As a result, I was able to devote my full attention to the exam and improving my score. Clearing your mind will look different for everyone. For me, I always made sure to go on walks in the evenings after studying for the MCAT and spend ample time with my family. These activities helped ground me, allowing me to develop a more mindful and optimistic attitude as I was preparing to tackle CARS.

