Study and testing strategies for the MCAT Exam

The MCAT is a “thinking test” test, designed to assess the following knowledge and skills.
1. Knowledge of basic physical and biological sciences (content)
2. Ability to interpret illustrations, graphs, figures, and tables (analytical reasoning and abstract thinking)
3. Ability to carefully read and process new information (problem solving)

Reading Passages
- Skim passage to get a sense of the topic and perspective.
- Actively read passage, taking note of important information, translating into your own words, and eliminating distracting details.
- For content sections, understand the basic framework of the science and assess what information is realistic in relation to scientific method and experimental design.

Answering Questions
- Understand what each question is really asking.
  - Extract information and data to interpret passage as it relates to each question.
  - Use reason when answering questions.
  - Look for key information—do not get lost in the details.
  - Read carefully—especially “all/none/except” type questions.
- Eliminate wrong answers using strike-out feature for online exam.
  - This lessens distractions and improves your odds if you have to guess.
- Answer every question (guessing is fine) before moving onto the next passage. Mark these as guesses and return to them if there is time—but do not leave anything blank.
  - For each passage, answer easy questions first.
- Use estimation rather than exact computation.

Studying for the Exam
- Have a positive attitude to take control of your own studying.
- Know exam format inside and out (practice, practice, practice).
  - Biological and Physical Sections
    - 70 minutes
    - 52 questions
    - 8-9 passages
    - 4-8 questions per passage
    - 8-10 stand alone questions
  - Verbal Reasoning
    - 60 minutes
    - 40 questions
    - 7 passages
    - 5-7 questions per passage

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• Allow adequate time for effective review (up to several months depending on your comfort with the content).
  o Set aside time each week for study.
    ▪ Treat the MCAT exam like an additional class for the term.
  o Review all content to determine where to concentrate your review.
  o After reviewing content for a section, do MCAT style practice problems (like Examkrackers book).
    ▪ Many resources offer practice question—be sure to use AAMC online exams to be familiar with the question format and the computer-based testing environment. (UO MCAT workshop includes AAMC exam access.)
    ▪ Review practice exams and learn from your mistakes.
• Look at the exam as a challenge and allow your confidence (in subject matter and exam format) to build as you try more practice exams.
• Continue reviewing topics, taking practice exams, and reviewing mistakes.
• Starting one week before the exam...
  o 6 days before exam
    ▪ Take one more full length AAMC Practice Exam (5 hours).
    ▪ Set healthy patterns all week: early bed time, good nutrition, exercise.
  o 5 days before exam
    ▪ Review answers to previous day's practice exam (2-3 hours).
      • For incorrect answers, identify if you misread a question or did not understand the science.
      • For correct answers, identify if there is a better way to get the answer.
  o 4 days before exam
    ▪ Review any areas of weakness (2-3 hours).
  o 3 days before the exam
    ▪ Continue to review any areas of weakness (2-3 hours).
  o 2 days before the exam
    ▪ NO MORE STUDYING.
  o 1 day before exam
    ▪ Take a break—DO NOTHING MCAT related.

Exam Day
• Have a positive attitude!
• Relax and keep up your healthy routine.
• Arrive early at the exam site.
• Apply the test-taking strategies you have fine-tuned during practice.
• Reward yourself after the exam (go to a movie, see a friend, go out to eat, etc.).
• Sleep well!

Adapted from Examkrackers, Princeton, and Kaplan MCAT review materials