HIGHER EDUCATION FOR A HIGHER CALLING

MEDSTART
GENERAL SKILLS
STUDY GUIDE
INTRODUCTION TO THE UMAT

INTRODUCTION
First of all, congratulations. The very fact that you are reading this document indicates that you are a motivated student who wants the very best chance of succeeding in the UMAT exam.

Over the next few weeks/months/years, you are going to embark on a journey that will see you prepared for one of the most difficult exams you have encountered to date. For most of you, this journey will not be easy. Tackling the UMAT requires special skills and a unique mindset that many of you have not yet cultivated.

This guide is here to help you on your journey. Like all our bibles, it is designed to be an active resource, not something that should be read once and then forgotten. You are encouraged to revisit the concepts in this guide several times over the course of your practice.

So whether your goal is to gain entry into the health sciences, to keep your options open or just to see how you would go in the UMAT, you have come to the right place.

Your journey starts here.

WHAT IS THE UMAT?
The UMAT stands for the Undergraduate Medicine and Health Sciences Admissions Test and was adopted as a standard of medical admission from 2003 onwards. It is produced by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). It is used as part of the admissions criteria for Medicine and other courses in the ‘UMAT Consortium’ universities (listed below).

The UMAT is held Australia wide on the last Wednesday of July.
**WHAT UNIVERSITIES AND COURSES REQUIRE THE UMAT?**

**SOUTH AUSTRALIA**  
The University of Adelaide  
- Medicine  
- Dental Surgery  

Flinders University  
- Clinical Sciences/Medicine  
- Vision Science  

**NORTHERN TERRITORY**  
Charles Darwin University  
- Clinical Sciences  

**NEW SOUTH WALES**  
The University of New South Wales  
- Medicine  
- Optometry  

The University of Newcastle/University of New England  
- Joint Medical program  

University of Western Sydney  
- Medicine  

**QUEENSLAND**  
The University of Queensland  
- Medicine (provisional entry)  
- Dental Science  

Bond University  
- Medicine  

**VICTORIA**  
Monash University  
- Medicine  

**STRUCTURE OF THE UMAT**  
The UMAT is entirely multiple choice (single best answer).  
Marks are not deducted for incorrect answers.  
The UMAT previously (2012 and prior) consisted of 134 questions in total, split over three separate sections (see figure 1).
CHANGES TO 2013 UMAT AND BEYOND

The structure of the UMAT was overhauled for the 2013 UMAT. There will no longer be three separate sections testing distinct question types.

Questions will now be mixed and interspersed amongst each other and the exam will be completed in one 3 hour long sitting.

There are still 134 multiple choice questions and the question styles remain the same as previous years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section 1</th>
<th>Section 2</th>
<th>Section 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Logical reasoning and problem solving</td>
<td>Understanding people</td>
<td>Non-verbal reasoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48 Questions</td>
<td>44 Questions</td>
<td>42 Questions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UMAT 2013

Logical reasoning and problem solving
+ Interpersonal understanding
+ Non-verbal reasoning

134 Questions
180 Minutes (3 hours)

See “Changes to UMAT2013” document for a more detailed breakdown of the changes and how to approach the exam.

WHY IS THE UMAT IMPORTANT?

According to ACER, the UMAT has been deemed necessary because there are “far more academically qualified applicants than there are places in such courses”.

To put it simply, the demand of students seeking to study Medicine and the Health Sciences is greater than the supply of places offered by the Universities.

In the past, selection was based purely on academic criteria. This led to a situation, where for better or worse, students had to score well within the top 1% in order to be admitted into courses such as Medicine. In fact, in NSW, students needed an equivalent ATAR of 99.75 for admission, regardless of whether students possessed the other characteristics needed to become good health practitioners.

According to ACER, the UMAT test is necessary because

1. There is little correlation between the level of prior academic achievement and success in health professional courses or practice. Implicitly, this suggests that selection on academic criteria alone may be of limited use in predicting who will make the best health professionals.

2. Selection based purely on academic criteria may discriminate against particular groups. Since the previous ATAR cutoffs for medicine were so high, it tended to advantage groups of people, such as certain schools that consistently achieved high school-leaving marks. Conversely, students who were not afforded the same opportunity, but could make good doctors, would be unfairly discriminated against.

3. Graduating health practitioners should have a demonstrated ability to communicate with and relate to their patients in addition to having the necessary technical expertise. This is the foremost reason put forward by ACER and suggests that it is in the community’s interest to have health practitioners with effective communications skills.

Hence, the UMAT and Interview, in theory, helps universities select students on a multi-dimensional level to avoid biases that may arise if selection were based solely on academic merit.

IS THE UMAT REALLY RELEVANT?

The relevance of the UMAT has long been questioned by both students and academics. It is sometimes difficult to see how completing a skills based exam under immense time pressure can predict a candidate’s future success as a health care professional.

The UMAT was introduced as a standard of medical admission in 2003 after the idea was put forth that the best candidates to study medicine were not necessarily those that achieved the best high school leaving marks. Medicine was in such high demand (as it is today) that only students in the top 1% of the state academically stood a chance of getting in. Academic results measure only a limited
aspect of total intelligence, and says nothing about a student’s interpersonal ability which is of paramount importance in the health sciences. It also became a situation where individuals would choose the lifelong career of medicine not because of their passion, but simply because they obtained the high marks required for entry.

The UMAT was hence created as a non-knowledge based aptitude test to help test other dimensions of intelligence – logical reasoning and problem solving skills, emotional intelligence, and the ability to reason in the abstract. Hence the three sections were born.

There have been several studies conducted on the validity of the UMAT.

According to the UMAT validity study (freely available online at http://umat.acer.edu.au/files/UVSExecutive_Summary.pdf):

- Section 1 tests reasoning ability and the literature indicates that this tests general or ‘fluid’ intelligence.
- Section 2 tests the ‘ability to identify, understand, and, where necessary, infer the thoughts, feelings, behaviour and/or intentions of people depicted in specific situations’ and these are related to the well supported constructs of ‘empathy, emotional intelligence and social intelligence’.
- Section 3 tests ‘the candidates’ ability to reason in the abstract’, with the analogical reasoning, categorical classification and sequential reasoning tested ‘associated with academic success and professional competence’. It appears to test general or ‘fluid’ intelligence much like section 1, but is included as a measure of cognitive ability independent of language.

There have also been several studies funded over the last four years in regards to the validity of the UMAT. A summary of these projects are available at: http://umat.acer.edu.au/files/UMAT_research.pdf.

Regardless of the validity, it is likely that the UMAT is going to be around for several years to come. You will have to sit it, and as such there is no point stressing about whether it is a fair criteria for medical admission.

---

**UMAT BREAKDOWN**

**THE CRUCIAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE BASED EXAMS (YEAR 12) AND APTITUDE TESTING (UMAT)**

Preparing for the UMAT is more similar to learning a skill (such as riding a bicycle) than it is to studying for a high school subject. This is due to the nature of the exam itself. The UMAT is an aptitude test while most exams in high school are knowledge-based exams. This has important implications on how you would prepare for the UMAT.

High school exams:

- Knowledge based
- Questions test whether you have learned a particular piece of information
- Time pressure less important for a well prepared student
- While not recommended – cramming can be effective

**UMAT:**

- Skills based
- Questions do not require prior knowledge, but test your ability to reason, understand people and pace yourself
- Time pressure immensely important even for well prepared student
- Cramming less effective (in much the same way as you can’t ‘cram’ to learn how to ride a bike)

These differences have significant implications on how to effectively undertake UMAT preparation.

Firstly, you need to engage in regular study in order to improve in the UMAT – it is much harder to learn everything in the few nights before the exam.

Secondly, you will learn the most through actual practice – doing questions in drills and exams – in much the same way that you cannot learn to ride a bike just by reading a book on how to do it. You must get on the bike itself.

Finally, once you learn the skills of the UMAT, it is difficult to forget them. This is the reason why those who begin preparation in year 10 or 11 are able to easily allocate the vast majority of their time to focussing on other subjects in year 12.
**IMPLICATIONS FOR UMAT QUESTIONS**

So far we have discussed the reasons behind the UMAT and the structure of the exam itself. As a quick recap:

- The UMAT is administered to help select candidates suitable for Medicine and Health sciences on a multi-dimensional level, distinct from academic merit.
- The UMAT aims to test logical reasoning, problem solving, interpersonal understanding and non-verbal reasoning ability through aptitude testing.

Understanding the reasoning behind the UMAT has important implications on the styles and content of questions that can be included in the exams. You can use this knowledge to your advantage.

**Prior knowledge, knowledge and cultural bias**

Your academic results will indicate how well you retain information. The UMAT is designed as a measure of intelligence distinct from academic ability.

The results of the UMAT would not be valid if a proportion of the test takers were advantaged in answering any particular question for one reason or another. This means that the questions included in the UMAT cannot be reliant on prior knowledge.

**KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURAL BIAS**

It is impossible to make a question completely free of bias. Non-verbal reasoning (formally section III) style questions are the closest we get to bias free.

In logical reasoning style questions (formally section I), while no prior knowledge is required, knowledge of the subject matter that the stimulus is based on can both help or harm you:

- The brain is better able to process and store information if it can link it to previous knowledge. As the majority of stimuli are of a general scientific nature, this small bias goes towards those who have a background in science.
- However, you cannot bring in prior knowledge to assist in answering the questions. An answer that is factually true but unsupported by the passage will always be incorrect.

In interpersonal understanding style questions (formally section II), it is more important to avoid cultural bias and gender stereotyping. This is a more insidious bias and hard to spot as stereotyping is an all too common and real part of our society.

**STRESS AND TIME MANAGEMENT**

Recall that the UMAT aims to select candidates suitable for medicine and the health sciences on a multi-dimensional level. One important characteristic of a future health professional is the ability to think accurately and quickly in times of stress.

ACER contends that the "UMAT is a high-stakes test; that is, the results of the test have the potential to make a major impact on the future career of the test taker". The ability to handle stress is a major component of the exam.

Aside from the economic unfeasibility of administering multiple smaller exams, the decision by ACER to administer a single high-stakes exam has the side benefit of testing a candidate’s ability to perform under high levels of stress.

The very knowledge that the UMAT is designed to be stressful is a liberating concept. You are supposed to feel stressed. Understand that almost all the other candidates, especially those who have not adequately prepared, will also find it equally or more stressful.
MINDSET AND KEY COMPETENCIES NEEDED TO MASTER THE UMAT

There is a very specific mindset that you must cultivate to give yourself the best chance of mastering the UMAT exam.

1. **You can ace this exam (regardless of prior academic success)**

   Everyone has heard stories of very academically capable students performing abysmally in the UMAT. Similarly, students who are less academically proficient have sometimes performed extraordinarily well in the UMAT.

   It is important to recognise that the UMAT is very different and distinct to high school and standard academic testing. It is possible to perform well in this exam regardless of your prior academic success.

   Some students have developed a disempowering set of beliefs about their own level of intelligence based on academic results. If you are only performing average in your school, it is easy to think that the better performing students are ‘smarter’ or more talented, when in reality academic marks generally reflect the amount of work put in.

   These students can throw away marks in the UMAT by thinking they are not ‘smart enough’ to answer certain questions. They often do not put 100% effort into solving the tough questions because they don’t believe they are capable of doing so.

   A disempowering story is not the truth. You can ace this exam.

2. **Everyone is on equal footing**

   When you do not know the answer to a question in a high school exam, there is very little you can do. You either know the information well enough or you do not.

   The beauty of the UMAT is that prior knowledge is not required to answer the questions. All the required information is given in the stimulus. Everyone who does the exam is on equal footing.

   As such, whenever you encounter a tough question, rather than thinking that you are not ‘smart enough’ to work it out and moving on, understand that every candidate will be finding that particular question difficult as well.

   It is always worth it to put 100% effort into solving the tough questions (sticking to time limits).

3. **‘Given unlimited time, most people would be able to score nearly 100% in the UMAT’**

   This is a very powerful mindset.

   As a student, you are conditioned for persistence. In high school, if you are unable to work out a question immediately, you are encouraged to persist (within reason) – an effort that often goes rewarded with at least partial marks.

   This approach will not serve you in the UMAT exam. Students often fall into the trap of spending excessive amounts of time completing difficult but solvable questions to find they have insufficient time to complete the exam.

   At its essence, the UMAT exam is difficult for only one reason: the immense time pressure. To put this into different terms:

   ‘given unlimited time, most people would be able to score nearly 100% in the UMAT’.

   This is a significant statement. It is the realisation that the UMAT is a game of **maximising marks**, not one of answering every single question correctly.

   Even deeper, this statement reveals that most people would be able to obtain the correct answer to any given question if they spent enough time on it (e.g. by attempting every single possible combination of patterns for a non-verbal reasoning (section III) construct question). This knowledge should in itself discourage you from being tempted to spend excessive amounts of time completing difficult questions.

   You need to cultivate a mindset where you can:

   1. Encounter a question,
   2. Recognise that it is difficult
   3. Know that you can complete it
   4. Know that it will take you five minutes to complete it
   5. **Know that your peers will complete it and get it correct**
   6. Choose to skip it, knowing that your peers who complete it and get it correct will loose the opportunity to answer 2-3 more questions at the end of the exam

   Students of lower intrinsic ability have in the past bested some of the most ‘intelligent’ and capable UMAT students, by better managing their time and intelligently skipping questions.
KEY SKILLS TO MASTER THE UMAT

There are a few key skills that you will need to develop over the course of your preparation. Once you become aware of these skills, they will naturally develop with practice.

1. The ability to discern question difficulty by reading the stimulus, question stem and/or answer choices

This is an important skill and will develop naturally once you are in mindset of maximising your marks through intelligent skipping and time management rather than focussing on getting every single question correct.

Being able to quickly recognise questions that are not worth completing saves precious time.

2. A thorough understanding of exactly how questions are constructed so you can predict the correct answer

If you have completed the MedStart course you should already have a good idea of this. It is important to be on the lookout for patterns and techniques that question writers commonly use to make a question difficult. With enough preparation, you can get to a point where you can read only the stimulus and question stem and predict what the correct and incorrect answer options will be (especially for the logical reasoning construct questions).

3. An instinctive awareness of time

This is also extremely important and comes with sufficient timed practice. Having a habitual awareness of time will allow you to pace yourself without constantly checking the clock. It will also prevent you from spending too long on one question unintentionally, which is an all too common occurrence.

4. The ability to complete working in a small area

Many students utilise scrap paper during the course of their UMAT practice to solve questions, particularly for problem solving construct questions. Whilst this is great for initial practice, students are often surprised at the lack of space they are provided in the actual exam itself. No scrap paper is provided in the UMAT exam, and space for working is only any white space that can be found in the question booklet itself.

During your practice, keep your working as small as possible.

GENERAL SKILLS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Improving your reading ability

The majority of UMAT questions involve reading. All Logical Reasoning construct questions will ask you to logically manipulate information given in a passage, and questions based on the Interpersonal Understanding construct involve inferring the thoughts and feelings of characters given (often lengthy) passages.

Since the difficulty of the UMAT essentially stems from the immense time pressure, it is very important that you are able to both read and process information as quickly as possible. There is generally an inverse relationship here, where the faster you read the less processing and retention that occurs.

Depending on how early you are starting your preparation for UMAT, it is generally unadvisable to start practicing the technique of ‘speed reading’. Speed reading takes months or years of constant, regular practice to reach a level where retention and processing of read information is not compromised.

Having said that, there are two activities you can perform in your spare time to help improve your reading and processing ability.

Wide reading

Wide reading of scientific articles and novels is beneficial.

Those of you who have a background in psychology may know that ‘attention’ is critical for forming ‘memory codes’ in your brain. However, not all attention is created equal, there are three main levels of processing that you can utilise when reading written text:

- Structural encoding – relatively shallow processing that emphasises the physical structure of the words
- Phonemic encoding – higher processing than structural encoding which emphasises what the written word sounds like
- Semantic encoding – the highest level of processing which emphasises the meaning of the input; it involves thinking about the objects and actions the words represent.

Whenever you are dealing with a UMAT question, you should always aim to process it semantically. The process of semantic encoding can be enhanced through a process called elaboration. Elaboration involves linking information gathered from a stimulus to other known information at
the time of encoding. The additional associations created by elaboration assist in retaining stimulus information when answering the question.

**Logical Reasoning Construct**

Most logical reasoning passages are of a general scientific nature. As you can appreciate, having prior knowledge of the subject matter can assist in processing stimulus information quickly and accurately.

However, always remember that you cannot use any prior knowledge in answering the questions, and that questions may deliberately include factually incorrect information.

*Interpersonal Understanding construct*

Reading of novels may help in developing your ability to infer thoughts and feelings from written characters. This is invaluable in improving performance in the interpersonal understanding questions of the UMAT.

As time for reading may be limited, particularly in year 12, make an effort to at least read your prescribed English texts.

**Always Practice**

Make an effort to ALWAYS practice reading and thinking quickly whenever you are reading a text.

Depending on how motivated you are, some will find this easier to do than others. However, effectively utilised, this will turn a wealth of the time you spend reading into productive UMAT practice. The advantage here is that this extra ‘practice’ will not cost you any more time.

What this involves is always practicing reading quickly, recalling information and drawing conclusions whenever you read an article, textbook, cereal box etc.

The more you can apply this, the better you will get at effective reading.

**Improving your Question Answering Proficiency**

There are several generic techniques that you can employ to improve your ability to handle UMAT questions. The goal of these techniques is to consistently utilise them throughout the course of your practice so that they become habitual (rather than something that needs to be actively ‘remembered’ and recalled).

**Predict the Answer**

This is a very powerful technique for all sections.

One of the reasons why the UMAT is so difficult is because of the nature of the available answer options. At the surface, many of the alternatives may seem plausible; in reality, however, only one of the options is the ‘best answer’.

The rest of the answer options are distracters. Distracters are answer options which are not correct, but which contain seemingly plausible conclusions. They often live up to their namesake, distracting and confusing candidates, ruining their train of thought and leading them astray.

By predicting the correct answer option after reading the question stem but prior to viewing the answer options, you minimise the risk of getting confused by the distractor options.

Your section guides will help you understand how to deconstruct questions in order to do this.

**Employ the Process of Elimination**

When faced with an exam question throughout your schooling life, it is likely you would have read the question and then searched your brain for the correct answer prior to noting it down.

In the case of knowledge based multiple-choice examinations in high school, you would not have to search your brain; rather, you would just have to recognise an answer option out of the four or five available to be the correct one.

When you were unsure of the response to a multiple-choice question, you may have employed the technique of elimination. This process involves ‘crossing off’ answers that you know cannot be correct with the intention of leaving one remaining option which would have to be correct – or at least minimise the options you are guessing between to have a greater chance of guessing it correct.

The UMAT is likely very different to any multiple-choice exam you would have completed in the past. Since it is not knowledge based, you will have to read the passage to gather the information prior to having to ‘recognise’ the correct answer out of the options available.

It is almost always beneficial for your accuracy to employ the process of elimination when looking at UMAT questions.

The exception to this rule occurs in Problem Solving construct questions and some Non-verbal Reasoning construct questions where this method would use up valuable time without a corresponding increase in accuracy.
START BY LOOKING FOR INCORRECT RESPONSES
For the UMAT, we can take this process a step further and propose a fundamental paradigm shift:

Look for the incorrect responses.

By initially looking for the obviously incorrect answer options rather than looking for the correct answer option, you improve your accuracy and minimise confusion due to distracting answer choices.

Remember that the ‘best’ (i.e. correct) answer option available will often not be 100% airtight. Do not to be excessively stringent when eliminating answer options that cannot be correct.

If guessing is required, make educated rather than blind guesses.

Guessing is a powerful technique that can help maximise your marks in the UMAT.

The UMAT is a standardised examination, and as such there is standard way of creating questions. The more practice you complete, the more you will be able to recognise this structure.

With sufficient practice, you can get to a stage where you can quickly read the passage, the question stem and/or the answer options and be able to predict what the correct answer will most likely be.

As such, if you find that you are pressed for time, it is often not the best approach to wait until the last minute and guess ‘all C’s’ for the remaining uncompleted questions. A better method would be to allocate a small amount of time for each remaining question to skim over them and make a more educated guess on what is most likely to be the correct answer based on structural and language cues.

Even if you are only able to eliminate one or two answer options based on this approach, your chances of guessing the question correct have dramatically improved.

There are several simple physical techniques that can assist you in maximising your UMAT performance.

UNDERLINING
Underlining is extremely beneficial in the UMAT exam. You should get into the habit of underlining key lines in the passage, qualifiers in the question stem and any unusual terms you might encounter.

This will assist in concentration (ensuring you are actively reading the passage), memory and understanding. It will also help avoid the near universal situation of forgetting the ‘not’ or another qualifier present in a question stem.

TRACKING
This might seem trivial, but it is a highly underrated physical technique. Tracking involves using your pencil tip to follow across the line that you are reading.

Tracking is important for a couple of reasons:

I. It assists in concentration, making it more difficult to ‘zone out’ during the three hour long exam

II. It assists in ensuring that you have read every word and have not missed important quantity modifiers or other qualifiers.

Tracking is great for improving concentration well beyond the improvements that come from having a visual aid when reading passages.

If you make the habit of tracking as much as possible whenever you are studying (both for the UMAT and for schoolwork), you will associate tracking with a mindset of concentration. Eventually, you will ‘classically condition’ yourself to actually concentrate when you start tracking.

CROSS OUT INCORRECT ANSWER OPTIONS
This warrants a separate heading because time and time again students fail to do this.

Once you find an answer option that cannot be the correct one, cross out the answer option.

Oftentimes, the ‘best’ and hence correct answer option will not be 100% correct. This leads to the temptation of reconsidering the other answer options to ‘double check’, wasting valuable time. Crossing out the definitively incorrect answer options will abolish this temptation.
GENERAL EXAM STRATEGY

THE CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF TIME IN THE UMAT

Also covered in UMAT Skills - Mindset and key competencies needed to master the UMAT - ‘Given unlimited time, most people would be able to score nearly 100% in the UMAT’

This is a very powerful mindset.

As a student, you are conditioned for persistence. In high school, if you are unable to work out a question immediately, you are encouraged to persist (within reason) – an effort that often goes rewarded with at least partial marks.

This approach will not serve you in the UMAT exam. Students often fall into the trap of spending excessive amounts of time completing difficult but solvable questions to find they have insufficient time to complete the exam.

At its essence, the UMAT exam is difficult for only one reason: the immense time pressure. To put this into different terms:

‘given unlimited time, most people would be able to score nearly 100% in the UMAT’.

This is a significant statement. It is the realisation that the UMAT is a game of maximising marks, not one of answering every single question correctly.

Even deeper, this statement reveals that most people would be able to obtain the correct answer to any given question if they spent enough time on it (e.g. by attempting every single possible combination of patterns for a non-verbal reasoning (section III) construct question). This knowledge should in itself discourage you from being tempted to spend excessive amounts of time completing difficult questions.

You need to cultivate a mindset where you can:

1. Encounter a question,
2. Recognise that it is difficult
3. Know that you can complete it
4. Know that it will take you five minutes to complete it
5. Know that your peers will complete it and get it correct
6. Choose to skip it, knowing that your peers who complete it and get it correct will lose the opportunity to answer 2-3 more questions at the end of the exam

Students of lower intrinsic ability have in the past bested some of the most ‘intelligent’ and capable UMAT students, by better managing their time and intelligently skipping questions.

AVOID REVISITING QUESTIONS

It is often beneficial in high school examinations to skip difficult questions with the intention of revisiting them at the end of the exam. This approach is not recommended for the UMAT. Students should attempt all UMAT questions with the understanding that they are very unlikely to have time to revisit any questions. This is for several reasons:

I. A large proportion of UMAT questions are ‘difficult’. Spending time reading the stimulus, question stem and answer options to determine that a question is difficult, without then going on to have a genuine attempt at completing it, wastes time.

II. Skipping questions with the intention of revisiting them is often futile as students rarely have additional time at the end of the exam to do this.

III. It is difficult to gauge the difficulty of a question without making a genuine attempt at completing it.

In almost all cases, students should skip questions with the understanding that they are unlikely to revisit it.

Note that we are not discouraging skipping – skipping is a crucial part of the UMAT exam. However, skipping with the intention of revisiting is not recommended.
COMMON PITFALLS AND ASSUMPTIONS FOR FIRST TIME UMAT TEST TAKERS

1. My friend succeeded in the UMAT without structured preparation. I do not need to apply focussed consistent effort in preparation for this exam.

Anecdotal evidence is dangerous. Humans characteristically relate well to stories. The trouble is that we tend to only hear stories of the few people who succeeded but never hear about the thousands of others that failed.

It is certainly possible to perform well in the UMAT with minimal preparation, but it is highly unlikely – especially in an environment where UMAT preparation is increasingly becoming the norm. Focussed and consistent practice is what will give you the best chance of success in this exam.

2. I am going to practice without the time pressure initially to master my ability to answer questions.

This is an extremely common and well-intentioned approach that students take at the start of their preparation. However, this approach is ineffective and not recommended.

Answering a question and answering a question quickly are two very different things. Training without the time pressure might allow you to solve more questions – but there is no guarantee that the skills and methods developed to answer a particular question without time pressure will assist in answering the question within a reasonable time.

The best approach to practice is covered in the supplementary document 'How to use MedStart resources'.

3. I should focus my preparation on the section I am best in

There is a temptation to focus preparation efforts to strong sections as it is gratifying to see success. This is not the best approach.

Preparation efforts should be directed primarily towards weak sections in the lead up to the UMAT. Once the UMAT is closer, practice should be evenly allocated between the three question constructs. The UMAT exam itself is where you should focus on your strengths.

4. I will be able to ‘cram’ for the UMAT

The UMAT is an aptitude test and different to knowledge based examinations. Learning how to master the UMAT is more similar to learning a skill such as playing a sport or riding a bike than it is to studying for a traditional high school exam.

In the same way you cannot ‘cram’ learning how to play a sport, the best improvements in the UMAT come from consistent practice with spaced repetition.

5. I am not ‘smart’ enough to ace the UMAT

Everyone has heard stories of very academically capable students performing abysmally in the UMAT. Similarly, students who are less academically strong have sometimes performed extraordinarily well in the UMAT.

It is important to recognise that the UMAT is very different and distinct to high school and standard academic testing. It is possible to perform well in this exam regardless of your prior academic success.

Some students have developed a disempowering set of beliefs about their own level of intelligence based on academic results. If you are only performing average in your school, it is easy to think that the better performing students are ‘smarter’ or more talented, when in reality academic marks generally reflect the amount of work put in.

These students can throw away marks in the UMAT by thinking they are not ‘smart enough’ to answer certain questions. They often do not put 100% effort into solving the tough questions because they don’t believe they are capable of doing so.

A disempowering story is not the truth. You can ace this exam.
Learn online or in small group classes held nationally in Australia and New Zealand

**Phone** 1300 99 UMAT (1300 99 8628)  **Web** medstart.com.au

**Hurstville Head Centre** Level 3, 12 Butler Road Hurstville 2220 NSW

**Epping** Shop 24 (Upper Ground), 74 Rawson Street Epping 2121 NSW

**Chatswood** Level 1, 457 Victoria Ave Chatswood 2067 NSW