

Guide & Tips For Preparing CAT 2010

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The Common Admission Test (CAT) is rated amongst the most elite and best examinations in the world. Going through CAT is like passing through the portals of a professional paradise. It will give you access to quality institutes that determine your placements. Two to three hours of this single test can make all the difference to your entire life.

Do we realise that taking the CAT is not enough to get into a top B-School but performing exceedingly well in the test and securing at least and over 90 percentile makes all the difference? One must aim to be amongst the top five thousand students out of lakhs who appear for CAT every year and finally get into one of the top B-Schools.

But if you just want to do MBA to get into any B-Schools, you need not try to go through CAT just for the experience of it, as that will be a waste of time. There are several other options open for admission to MBA i.e. MAT, ATMA, AMU, AIMT etc., for other level B-Schools.

CAT is CAT

CAT is known not only as one of the most competitive exams but also very different in character. For many, design or structure of CAT is a strange and unfamiliar territory, which is an assessment of individual's ability in the

realm of reasoning, verbalisation and quantitative skills under pressure of time.

Preparatory Initiative

Preparation for CAT may seem very easy for some, while others may consider it very difficult depending on the ability/competence of the students.

Many students start their preparation in the final year of graduation for CAT, and for this they are required to either join some coaching class or study on their own. The Final-Year students, who are planning to go for MBA after graduation, must keep in mind that the syllabus of final year is quite exhaustive and relatively difficult. Moreover, the result of his /her performance in graduation has a long-term impact including getting admission to MBA. Usually, students skip their college classes to prepare for CAT, which results in lower attendance in colleges and students may end up securing lower percentage/ marks in the graduation.

In a situation like this, one needs to keep a balance between both the preparation for CAT and final-year graduation exam.

It is a known fact that CAT is not a simple examination for any graduate with any background—be it in Arts, Science, Commerce, Engineering etc. Therefore, it is best that these aspiring students take a minimum break of at



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least one year for preparation after graduation during which they are able to fully concentrate on the preparation of CAT with appropriate planning.

Tips for Preparation

- Set a goal and prepare work plan: An individual should prepare his time table in a practical manner. Records show that CAT preparation is individualistic—some clear the CAT with less than a month's preparation, while few others do not succeed even after three or four years. This only highlights the relevance of timely application of knowledge with clarity and balance.
- One should keep in mind that there is no right time to prepare for CAT. Once the decision to appear for this test has been taken, the preparation must start immediately.





- Introspect and find your own strengths and weaknesses.
- Be regular and consistent in everyday subject preparation.
- Though different students would take different time for preparation based on their abilities, at least one-two hours of a day should be kept for CAT preparation.
- CAT traditionally is a multiple choice based examination covering English language skill, logical analysis of data interpretation and quantitative applications of mathematics, algebra and geometry. The spread of doing well in every section should be your mantra to qualify.
- Approaching the CAT would hence need splitting it into the vital, the essential and the desirable, based on the quantum of marks allotted. The next step would be to classify them into complex, difficult and simple sections depending on each person's strength. The final step would be to create a time-table and schedule factoring the above.
- Some students have doubt about their mathematics, while others may be weak in English. In this condition, one should give extra time to the area he/she finds difficult. If needed, it is advisable to take extra coaching classes to have full command over all the subjects.
- Ensuring that the basics become sound and strong is one of the crucial things.

- Try to correlate the basics in application and interpretation as the next step.
- One should not just memorise things, but rather should go in depth and understand the formula and basic fundamentals, especially in mathematics. Because one may understand one method while studying but, knowing how to solve it when it comes in another format in CAT, is more important.
- Increasing mental calculation speed is key to succeeding in this test.
- Building vocabulary should remain one of the main focus also.
- Improving reading speed is one of the key steps needed to be taken. Reading newspapers daily as many times as possible, keeping the time and speed in mind will help.
- Reading about General Knowledge across the span of economics, politics, national and international news and other abstract topics like sociology, psychology to increase one's knowledge as well as the reading speed is very important. Moreover, reading editorials in newspapers and magazines helps to put the news in perspective and helps to train oneself to cultivate opinions and understand trends.
- In CAT, there would be many questions which may look very easy, but when one actually attempts them, it may take so much time to solve them that one may have to leave the questions unanswered. So it is always a good idea to start with a question which one can

easily solve. Time management is very important for the students when they appear for CAT.

- Practise by taking mock tests. Practice would make you perfect. Practise last three years' test papers to answer many times to measure your accuracy and time management.
- It would also be a good idea to consult some seniors who have been successful in CAT.
- Joining a good coaching class is very helpful. There are several coaching centres set up across India, that are full-time commercially engaged in orienting and preparing students for appearing in CAT.
- **INSIGNIFICANT BECOMES SIGNIFICANT**

One should note that apart from an overall stress of appearing in CAT, there are some small issues that may become big if not handled carefully. It is desirable that the location of test centres, mode of transport and time has to be given due consideration. One should reach the exam centre at least half an hour before the commencement of exam. This will give one time to relax mind, or it may stress one physically and mentally as well which may impact exam negatively.

In addition, aspiring students should be accompanied by family members or whom the candidates have confidence on, which generally keeps the morale high for appearing for test.

Key Facts to be kept in mind during CAT

- **Attitude and Aptitude:** How to manage a question paper within the given time-frame is an important subject which has a direct bearing on the attitude and aptitude of every aspiring student. Generally speaking, most of the students' primary objective is to score as high as possible. It is crucial to be objective about one's attitude towards this kind of a test and not become overly emotional about it, as that would mean an individual is bent on just solving one problem and spend too much time on that.
- **Mental and Physical Fitness:** Mental fitness is possible only through physical fitness. Ensuring balanced diet, proper sleep including short refreshing naps and regular exercise routines would go a long way in enabling the students' readiness to take this immensely important test of their life. Including this in one's time-table is a good plan. In short, "Help your brain to help you".

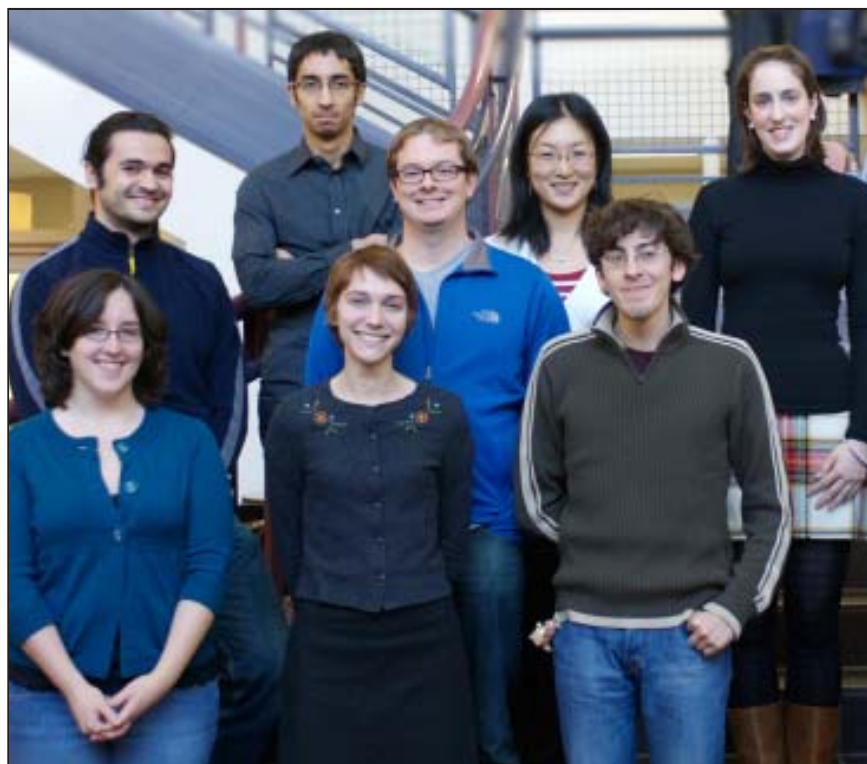
- **Speed:** Speed is one of the most important factors to be considered to get a high score. A strong foundation of basics is imperative to solving any question whether tough or easy. This is a prerequisite for speed-solving.
- **Concentration:** This test requires immense amount of concentration from every individual who attempts or undertakes it. For most of us, it is not an easy task to concentrate so intensely, especially, for the first-time test-takers. However, the comprehensive tests ensure that one sits for a continuous stretch of two hours and it ultimately helps to increase one's attention span.
- **Time Management:** The aspirants should manage time and allocate certain amount of time to each section depending on their strengths and weaknesses.
- **Accuracy/ Negative Marking:** Accuracy is the number of correct questions out of attempted questions. The students need to be careful about maintaining accuracy, because marking the wrong option will impose negative marking in CAT. The key is to score qualifying percentile in all sections of the CAT, therefore ignoring even one of the areas of the test paper can lead to failure. Paying attention to each section during the exam and attempting at least 20-25 questions in each section first and then going for an attempt in the section in which one feels that he can do better is a good strategy.

New CAT Pattern

Ending a three-decade old paper-pencil format for CAT, IIMs decided to adopt computer-based test from 2009 onwards. However, the nature of study preparation does not depend on whether CAT is a paper-based or computer-based test. As far as preparing the concepts are concerned, the same kind of preparation is required for online-test also. The aspirants do not need to be extraordinarily computer savvy to take the online-test, all that is required is the ability to use the mouse and a few basic keys.

The actual duration of the test is 2 hours and there is a 15 minutes' tutorial to familiarise the candidates with the layout of the screen and functionality available during the test.

The test consists of multiple-choice questions to evaluate a candidate's quantitative, verbal and logical & data-interpretation abilities. While the pattern



of the test in terms of sections remains the same, number of questions varies from time to time. Generally, there is a total of 3 sections and about 75 questions in the test, with about 25 questions in each section, 4 marks are given for a correct answer and 1 negative mark is given for every wrong answer. The total duration of the test is 2 hours 15 minutes.

| Sections | Question Count | Section Points | Negative Marking |
|-------------------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------------|
| Quantitative Ability | 20 | 80 | 0.25 × Question points |
| Verbal Ability | 20 | 80 | 0.25 × Question points |
| Logical & Data Interpretation | 20 | 80 | 0.25 × Question points |

Rules to be followed during the test:

- All candidates start the test at the same time.
- Candidates are to remain in their seats for the entire duration of the test, even if they complete the test early.
- Candidates are not allowed to use calculators, log tables or any printed materials during the test.
- Every candidate needs to be seated at a desk with computer terminal.
- Each candidate is provided with scratch paper and a pencil for calculation. After the test, the candidate must return the scratch paper to the test centre administrator.

- Test centre administrators are not allowed to answer any questions pertaining to the test content. If a candidate does not understand a question in the test, he/she should answer the question to the best of his/her ability.
- There is no penalty for questions that are left un-attempted and negative points will be given to the wrong answers.

Enjoying the Challenge

Once you are fully prepared, the next step is go and give your best. You need to break your work into schedules throughout the day, leaving some time for enjoyment. It is very important to maintain a relaxed mind. Group interaction with your friends who are equally serious about cracking CAT, will also help you keep motivated.

Have a strong desire to achieve the percentile you want to get into the B-School of your choice and back it up with hard work. Hard work and sincerity in preparation are the keys to your success. Your approach should be to hope for the best and remain prepared for the worst. CAT preparation is like giving it all you have got and at the same time, believing that there is a life beyond CAT also.

Making the process an enjoyable process is of vital importance and will give you confidence. If you think of it as a burden, you might as well not go through the throes of CAT.

ALL THE BEST!