

Your MCAT Game Plan

Coursework, Sequencing, and Community College

Building Your Academic Foundation for the Exam

Ken Tao, PhD

Director of MCAT at MedSchoolCoach



The "Firehose" of Content



The Situation

You are about to face the most content-heavy semesters of your life. The volume of information is intense.



The Mistake

Treating these courses as just "boxes to check" for your degree instead of foundational learning.



The Reality

Every science course you take now is literally studying for the MCAT. Prioritize retention above all else.

GPA & The MCAT: The Cumulative Effect

The Chain Reaction

Science content isn't isolated; it builds linearly.

- Struggle in Gen Chem → Struggle in Organic Chem
- Struggle in Organic Chem → Struggle in Biochem
- Struggle in Physics class → Struggle in Physics on MCAT

The Efficiency Principle

Scenario A: Learn it properly once. MCAT Prep becomes fast review.

Scenario B: Low grade earned. MCAT Prep becomes re-teaching yourself from scratch, wasting valuable dedicated study time.

Foundational Academics: The First Third

Focus: General Chemistry & Introductory Biology.

The MCAT Connection

These two subjects represent $\sim 1/3$ of the science content, appearing in both Chem/Phys and Bio/Biochem sections.

Strategy

Don't just memorize for the midterm. Ask "How does this connect?" If you miss Stoichiometry now, you'll pay for it later.



The Community College Advantage (Sequencing)

The Danger: Splitting Sequences

Taking Gen Chem I at Community College and Gen Chem II at a University creates risk.

The Risk

Curriculums often don't align. You might miss entire chapters (e.g., Physical Thermodynamics) that the University assumed you covered in Chem I.

Recommendation: Finish the entire sequence at one institution to minimize content gaps.



Building Early CARS Habits

The Problem

Many students simply do not read enough complex text daily. If words like "esoteric" or "pragmatism" stump you, you miss the passage's point.

The Daily Habit

- 📖 Read complex news articles (The Economist, The Atlantic) or non-fiction books regularly.
- 🧠 Train your brain to process dense, unfamiliar language so it doesn't feel foreign on test day.



Advanced Academics: The "Weed Out" Courses

Focus: Organic Chemistry (Logic & Skills) and Physics (High Anxiety).

The Trap

Taking O-Chem and Physics in the same semester often tanks the GPA due to the heavy conceptual load.

The Recommendation

If possible, **offset them**. Protect your GPA at all costs. O-Chem teaches you how to think logically; Physics requires math without a calculator.

The "Invisible" Prerequisites



Statistics

Often ignored, but crucial for analyzing data in the Psych/Soc and Bio/Biochem sections.



Psychology

Don't treat as an "easy A". Pay attention to research methods and terminology.



Sociology

The MCAT tests these rigorously. Understanding social structures is key for the Psych/Soc section.

The Transfer Shock (For CC Students)

Phenomenon & Cause

Students transferring from CC to University often see a temporary GPA drop ("Transfer Shock").

Why? Faster pace, larger classes, and less individual support.

Impact & The Fix

A drop in GPA signals a drop in content mastery. Don't rush.

- Underschedule your first semester.
- Avoid the hardest upper-div Bio class immediately.
- Give yourself time to adjust.

The Golden Rule of Scheduling

The Rule

Try to take ALL prerequisite courses before you take the MCAT.

Common Error

Not taking Biochemistry before the MCAT. Trying to self-teach metabolic pathways while practicing strategy is a recipe for burnout.



Traditional vs. Gap Year Timelines

Timeline A: No Gap Year

Finish Pre-reqs: Spring of Junior Year.

Take MCAT: Spring of Junior Year.

Risk: Very high pressure; often forces students to cram classes and compromise GPA.

Timeline B: Gap Year (Recommended)

Finish Pre-reqs: Spring of Senior Year.

Take MCAT: Summer after Junior year, during Senior year, or after graduation

Benefit: Apply with a higher GPA and MCAT score. No rushing.

Summary Checklist

- ✓ **Foundation:** Master all prereqs. Read complex articles regularly.
- ✓ **CC Students:** Try to finish sequences at one school to avoid curriculum gaps.
- ✓ **Advanced:** Survive O-Chem & Physics by offsetting them. Protect the GPA at all costs.
- ✓ **Timeline:** Plan your test date based on when you finish your classes, not peer pressure.

Questions?

"Based on your current course schedule, when is the earliest realistic date for you to take the MCAT?"