
MCAT Examination Repeat Policies and Data

RETAKING POLICIES

The Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) provides examinees with the opportunity to take the exam more than once, subject to policies for within-year and lifetime limits. MCAT examinees can test up to three times in one calendar year and four times across two calendar years. An examinee cannot take the exam more than seven times in their lifetime. Not showing up for an exam counts as an attempt toward the lifetime limit. Voided scores count as an attempt toward the lifetime limit. Students can appeal for special permission to exceed the limits.

DATA ON RETAKING THE MCAT EXAM

Since this exam's introduction in 2015, the vast majority of examinees (just under 95%) have tested at most once or twice. About 5% have tested three times. Only about 1% of examinees have tested more than three times.

The *Guide to Using MCAT® Data in 2020 Medical Student Selection* (www.aamc.org/newmcatguide, p. 13) shows the types of score gains examinees obtain upon retesting, illustrating these trends using data from the three most recent testing years. Figure 9 (on page 13 of the guide and shown below) shows the distributions of score gains (and losses) on examinees' second attempts at the exam, by their first-attempt scores. The retester analyses in the Guide include scores from test takers who tested for the first time in 2016, 2017, or 2018 and then retook the exam in that window.

Figure 9 uses box-and-whisker plots to show the median score gain/loss (the change at the 50th percentile), along with score changes at the 10th, 25th, 75th, and 90th percentiles. The score changes at the 10th and 90th percentiles are shown by the ends of the "whiskers," those at the 25th and 75th percentiles are shown by the "box" (the left edge of each box shows the score change at the 25th percentile, and the right edge shows the change at the 75th percentile), and the median change is shown by the vertical bar inside each box.

The data show that retesters across a wide range of scores tend to obtain higher scores on their second exams. The median gain was two to three total score points for examinees who tested a second time and whose first-attempt scores ranged from 472 to 517. For examinees whose initial scores ranged from 518 to 528, the median score gain was zero points. It is important to note, however, that there was considerable variation in the magnitude and direction of score changes, with some examinees posting increases or decreases greater than four points.

In a recent survey, admissions officers reported using different strategies for examining retesters' scores. For example, some admissions committees use all exam scores in conjunction with other information about academic preparation that may explain any score changes. Other admissions committees use applicants' most recent exam scores in the admissions process or applicants' "best score" as represented by their highest reported total score. Other committees compute the average total score across the multiple attempts.

It is important for admissions officers to examine the information in applicants' transcripts and applications in interpreting retesters' scores. Data suggest that average score gains on the second attempt are greater when the time between the first and second attempt is greater. Information in applicants' files, such as completion of a postbaccalaureate program or other coursework, can help explain gains in applicants' scores over time.

Figure 9. Changes in MCAT total scores between the first and second attempts for MCAT examinees from 2016 to 2018 who retested.

