



Tomorrow's Doctors, Tomorrow's Cures

An Introduction to the MCAT

Alpha Epsilon Delta National Meeting
March 2006

Ellen Julian, PhD
Associate VP of the AAMC
and Director of the MCAT

Learn

Serve

Lead

Association of
American Medical Colleges

MCAT History

Failure rate of 1st-year medical students:

- 20% in 1928
- 7% in 1946

“Reduction...due mainly to the Moss Test”
(McGaghie,2002)



MCAT: What Is It?



applying to medical schools

MCAT® Home

[Tomorrow's Doctors Home : Applying to Medical School](#)

About the MCAT

Welcome to the Official Medical College Admission Test (MCAT®) Web Site

Registration

About the MCAT

Practice Tests

Almost all U.S. medical schools require applicants to submit MCAT scores. Medical college admission committees consider MCAT scores as part of their admission decision process.
[More >>](#)

MCAT Scores

Applicant Data

Search

MCAT News

Contact MCAT

- **MCAT scores from the August 2004 administration are now available.** [More >>](#)
- **The Percentage and Scaled Score Tables** for the 2004 administrations are available. [More >>](#)
- Practice Test 7 is available online! [More >>](#)
- Required Reading: [MCAT 2004 Essentials](#) (PDF, 298kb).
- Brochure Available: [MCAT 2004 Registration Information](#) (PDF, 135kb).
- [Test administration dates](#) for the 2005 MCAT are available.

MCAT Sample Items

The following passages and item-sets have been extracted from *MCAT Practice Test 3R*. Free access to the full-length version of this test is available through [MCAT Practice Online](#).

- [Physical Sciences](#) (PDF, 243kb)
- [Verbal Reasoning](#) (PDF, 217kb)

Read the [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

MCAT Testing History (THx) & Online Score Release

Send your MCAT scores using the new [Testing History \(THx\)](#) Reporting System.

MCAT Practice Online

Five full-length MCATs are available—over 1,000 items! [Practice Tests >>](#)

MCAT Student Manual

Describes the content, types of questions asked and test preparation involved in taking the MCAT. [More >>](#)

MCAT Publications

Your official source for MCAT information and preparatory materials is

4 Content Areas

Physical Sciences (PS)

- General chemistry, physics
- 77 questions, 100 min

Verbal Reasoning (VR)

- 55 questions, 85 min

Biological Sciences (BS)

- Org chemistry, biology
- 77 questions, 100 min

Writing Sample (WS)

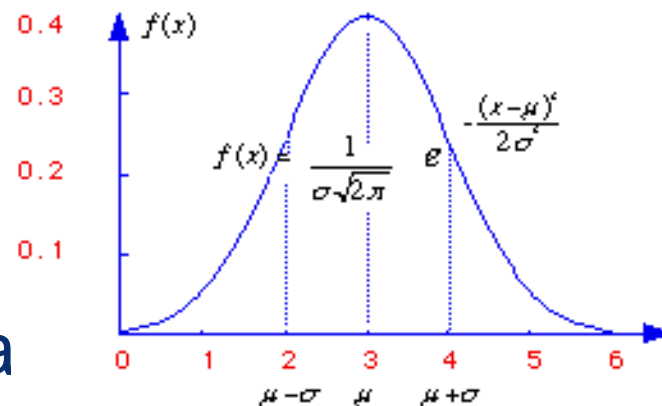
- 2 essays, 60 min



4 Scores

VR, PS, BS

- scores go from 1 to 15
- average ~ 8.0
- scores equated to 1991 exa



WS

- scores: J,K,L,M,N,O,P,Q,R,S,T
- J is very bad, T is very good

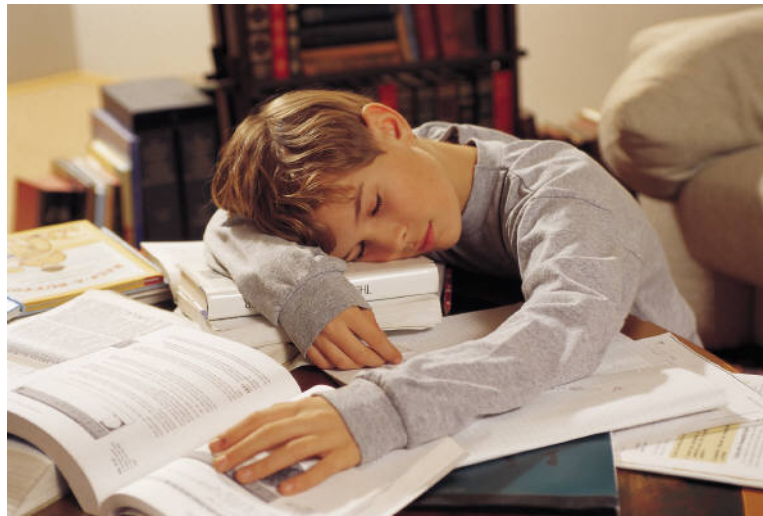
Total Score

- VR + BS + PS appended to WS (e.g., 45T)

Science Content

“Assess knowledge of basic concepts and scientific problem solving,

NOT the ability to memorize scientific facts”



Verbal Reasoning (VR)

“ability to understand, evaluate and apply information and arguments presented in prose texts”

450-600 word reading passages

5 - 10 questions about each passage

all necessary info is in the passage



Writing Sample (WS)

“ability to develop a central idea, synthesize concepts, present ideas cohesively and logically, and write clearly”

Writing topics do not assess subject-matter knowledge



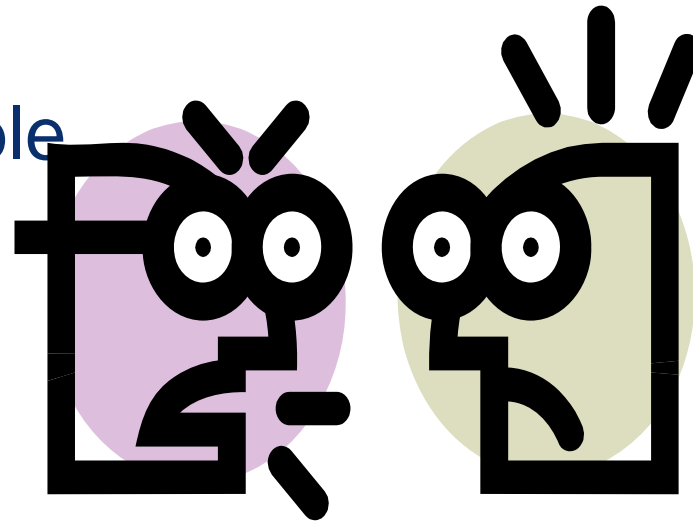
Writing Sample

Each essay scored by 2 readers

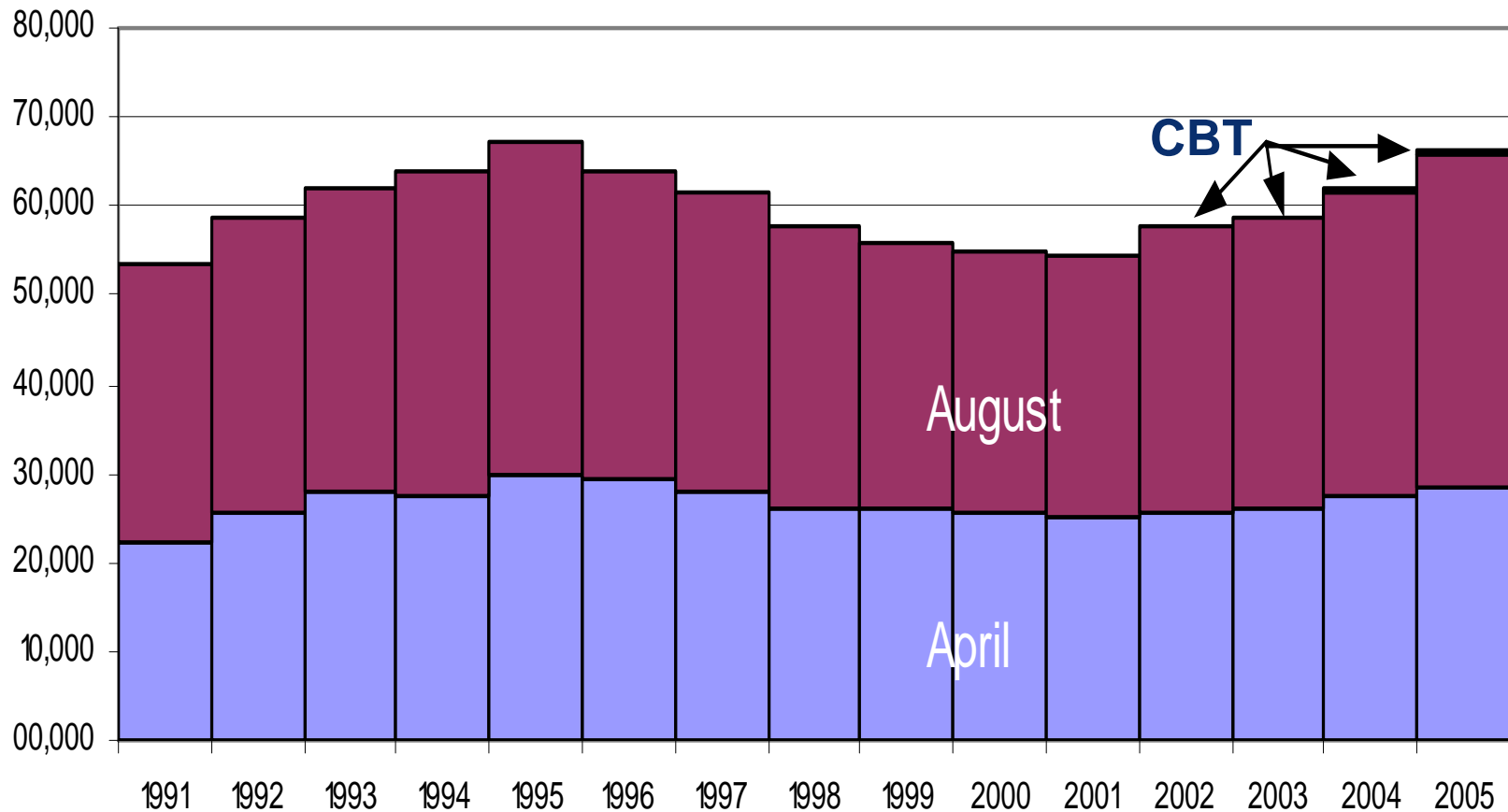
- If they disagree, it is scored by an expert
- inter-rater reliability = .86

Canadian medical schools use WS scores more than U.S. schools

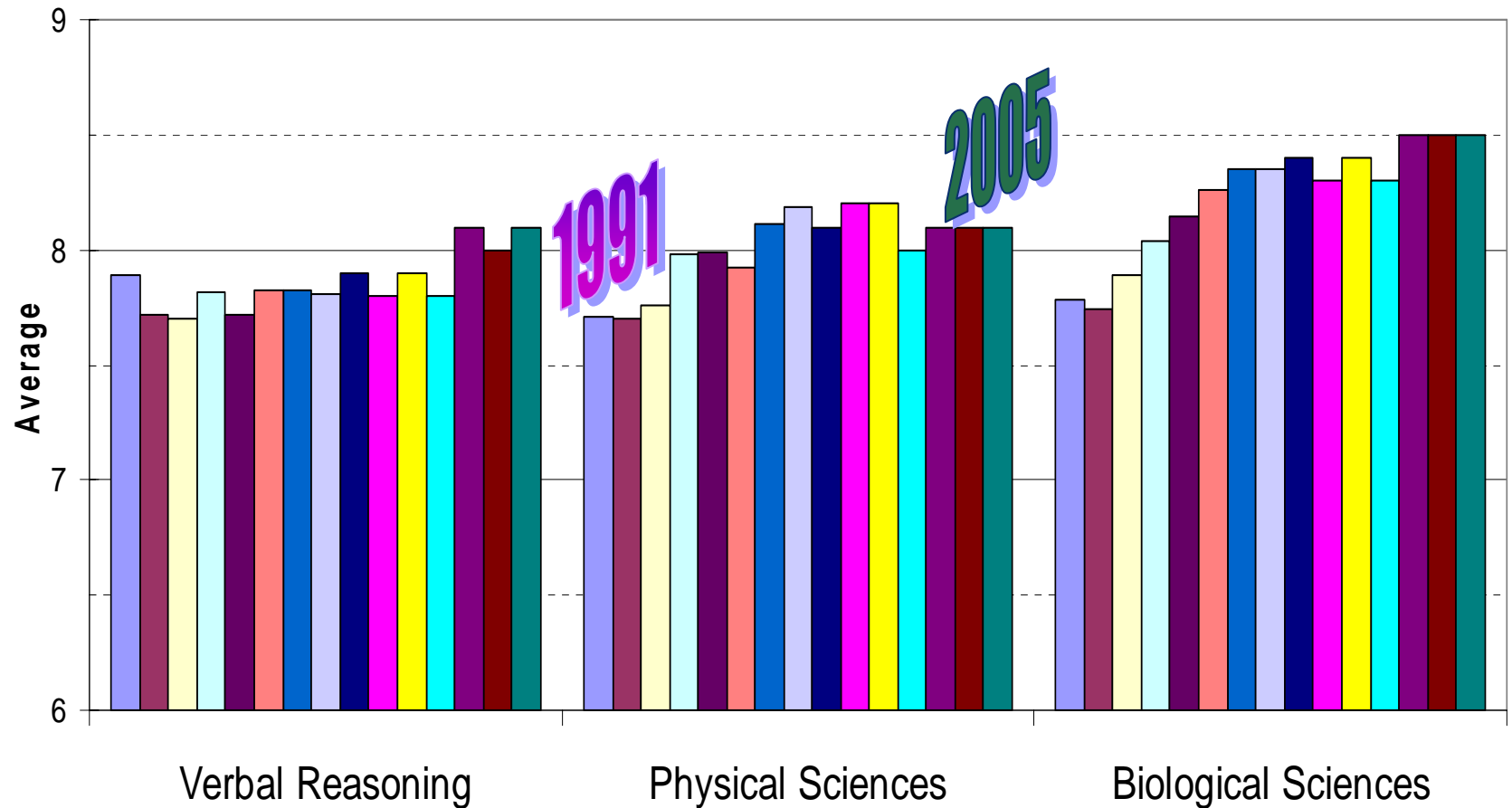
Score challenges available



MCAT Volumes



Average Scores Across Time



THE CURRENT PAPER MCAT



Passage 1

When agents of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service seized the hides and horns of four Chinese sheep as contraband in 1988, they set off a scientific row that continues to this day. It now spans three continents and has involved a prominent politician, the Smithsonian Institution, and top wildlife officials in an arcane dispute over taxonomy. The basic question: were the sheep, which were shot by . . . U.S. hunters, a rare breed that is protected by an international treaty? . . .

The animals killed in China were Tibetan argali, distant cousins of the bighorn sheep that live in the American Rockies. Once plentiful in the Tibetan high plateau, they have been slaughtered for meat and hides and their numbers have dwindled in recent decades.

Rarely seen by Westerners, the argali became the subject of a taxonomic dispute because historic accounts name several subspecies, but only one, *Ovis ammon hodgsoni*, has been listed as endangered in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). India asked that *hodgsoni* be protected in 1973, and other parties to CITES, including China and the United States, raised no objection. Some experts say that at least two names have been used in the past to describe the protected subspecies, and that regardless of nomenclature, all the argali in Central Asia are endangered.

When challenged, the hunters first said they had shot a type of argali called *Ovis ammon darwini*, not named on the endangered list. Later, they said the animals were *Ovis ammon dalai lamae*, also absent from the list. Their claims were supported by the Smithsonian and the Scientific Authority of the Fish and Wildlife Service in letters to the head of the nomenclature committee of CITES, but were firmly rejected by a group of academics.

Four independent wildlife experts say that *dalai lamae* is just a synonym for *hodgsoni*, claiming there is a mix-up in the literature, and that the animals killed on [the] hunt assuredly were not *darwini*. The names were assigned by Europeans in the 19th century, *hodgsoni* being identified by explorers in the south and *dalai lamae* by those in the north. . . .

All this wrangling over taxonomy may have obscured the bigger question of whether Tibetan argali—by whatever name—are abundant enough to be hunted for sport. [One expert] says they definitely are not. He has traveled widely in China since 1977, even passing within 20 miles of the spot where the recent hunt took place, and in that time he has seen relatively few of these animals. "All the

argali in Central Asia are disappearing very rapidly," he says, "and they will all end up on the completely protected list." He thinks the *dalai lamae* type, referring to Tibetan argali in the northern end of their range, are even "scarcer" than the ones that everyone recognizes as *hodgsoni*.

. . . Another wildlife expert who has been in Tibet . . . finds himself in both camps. He thinks *dalai lamae* and *hodgsoni* are the same subspecies, but argues that the best way to protect them is to license them for hunting by foreigners. This, he claims, will give local people an incentive to keep the population alive. . . .

One good result that could come out of this bitter debate . . . is that the intense scrutiny argali will get in CITES meetings in the coming months will probably lead to a new consensus on their proper classification and the degree of protection they should have from human predators.

Adapted from Eliot Marshall, "Mountain Sheep Experts Draw Hunters' Fire." ©1990 by the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

1. Based on the information in the passage, which of the following statements is NOT true?

- Ovis ammon hodgsoni* are a subspecies of Tibetan argali.
- Tibetan argali are found in China.
- Dalai lamae* and *darwini* are different names for the same subspecies of Tibetan argali.
- Ovis ammon darwini* are not listed by CITES as an endangered species.

2. According to the passage, what reason do wildlife experts offer to support their claim that the argali that were killed on the hunt were on the endangered list?

- The argali were of the subspecies *Ovis ammon darwini*.
- The argali were of the same subspecies as the one listed.
- The argali were of a subspecies identical to *Ovis ammon darwini*.
- The argali were of a rare subspecies not normally found in China.

SIDE 1

GENERAL PURPOSE - NCS® - ANSWER SHEET

SEE IMPORTANT MARKING INSTRUCTIONS ON SIDE 2

1	A B C D E	11	A B C D E	21	A B C D E	31	A B C D E	41	A B C D E
2	A B C D E	12	A B C D E	22	A B C D E	32	A B C D E	42	A B C D E
3	A B C D E	13	A B C D E	23	A B C D E	33	A B C D E	43	A B C D E
4	A B C D E	14	A B C D E	24	A B C D E	34	A B C D E	44	A B C D E
5	A B C D E	15	A B C D E	25	A B C D E	35	A B C D E	45	A B C D E
6	A B C D E	16	A B C D E	26	A B C D E	36	A B C D E	46	A B C D E
7	A B C D E	17	A B C D E	27	A B C D E	37	A B C D E	47	A B C D E
8	A B C D E	18	A B C D E	28	A B C D E	38	A B C D E	48	A B C D E
9	A B C D E	19	A B C D E	29	A B C D E	39	A B C D E	49	A B C D E
10	A B C D E	20	A B C D E	30	A B C D E	40	A B C D E	50	A B C D E
51	A B C D E	61	A B C D E	71	A B C D E	81	A B C D E	91	A B C D E
52	A B C D E	62	A B C D E	72	A B C D E	82	A B C D E	92	A B C D E
53	A B C D E	63	A B C D E	73	A B C D E	83	A B C D E	93	A B C D E
54	A B C D E	64	A B C D E	74	A B C D E	84	A B C D E	94	A B C D E
55	A B C D E	65	A B C D E	75	A B C D E	85	A B C D E	95	A B C D E
56	A B C D E	66	A B C D E	76	A B C D E	86	A B C D E	96	A B C D E
57	A B C D E	67	A B C D E	77	A B C D E	87	A B C D E	97	A B C D E
58	A B C D E	68	A B C D E	78	A B C D E	88	A B C D E	98	A B C D E
59	A B C D E	69	A B C D E	79	A B C D E	89	A B C D E	99	A B C D E
60	A B C D E	70	A B C D E	80	A B C D E	90	A B C D E	100	A B C D E

Test Day



Paper MCAT

- administered 2 weekends each year
 - April
 - August
- ~ 70,000 people each year
- costs \$210 in 2006
- 6 hours testing, 8-10 hour day
- scores in 60 days
- small number of computerized MCATs



Common Irregularities

“Bubbling” after time is called

Copying from others’ answer sheets

Timing errors

Noise

Heat



The Future Computerized MCAT



Computerized MCAT

Fully implement in 2007

- Quicker scores (30 days -> 2 weeks)
- More testing dates (19 days)
- Small, quiet, standardized test sites
- Shorter test day (5 hours)
- Biometric identification (fingerprints, photos)



More testing opportunities

(current)



Paper

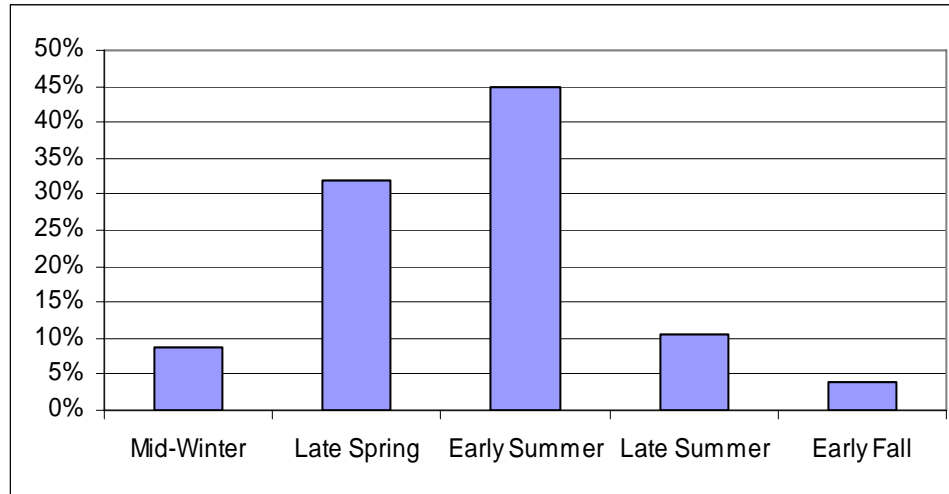
- Sat, Sun in April, August
- Reg ends a month before test day

CBT

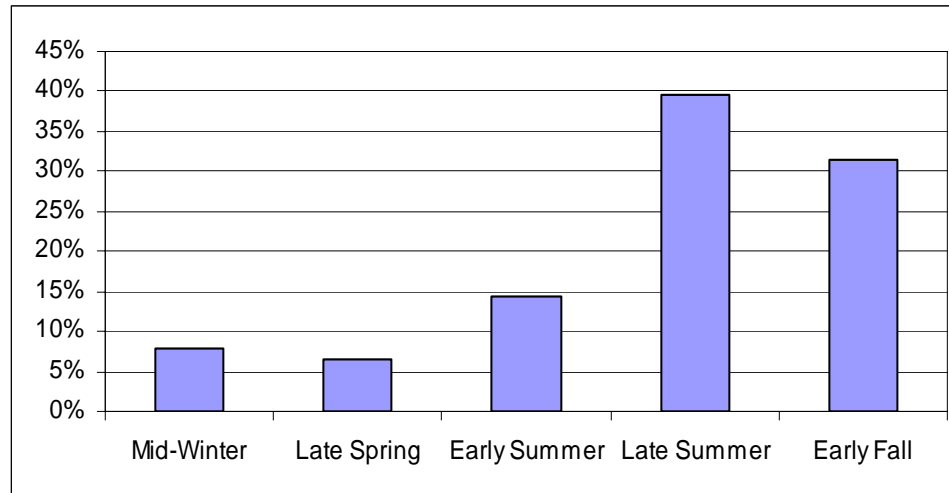
- Not just weekends (weekdays, too)
- Not just mornings (afternoon options)
- 19 days (three days have two sessions)
- Reg until test week (BUT...60 days to assure close to home)

Advisors predict volumes

**When will
first-timers
take?**



**When will
repeaters
take?**



Retake policy

Paper:

- twice a year

Considering:

- Can be registered for only one at a time
(maybe can't register until scores are out)
- three times per year

“>3 documentation rule” may become “>4 rule”

Refund Policy

- Changing NOW
- Used to be lenient
- Now it's tough
- Must cancel 10 business days before test
- In 2007, will be able to reschedule later

Testing locations

- Prometric is doing “capacity planning”
- Prometric will be building new sites
- Number of retakes allowed will impact volumes
- Hear clearly the need for sites in college towns
- Having discussions about sites in colleges

Preparing for the MCAT

Study, study, study

Read the *MCAT Student Manual*

Use textbooks, work in a group

Take practice tests under time limits

Read, read, read – then argue!

- Editorials, essays
- Argue *for* the author's point of view, and then *against* it.
- What information would help you decide?



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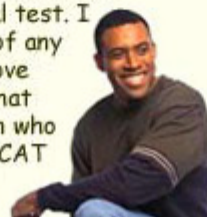
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Here's What Members of the MCAT Practice Online Community are Saying:



"Has been a lifesaver for me. Helped me zone in on areas I need to focus on for better performance."

"MCAT Practice Online was a very significant aid to my performance on the actual test. I can't think of any way to improve something that every person who takes the MCAT should use."



"It's an amazing step for any student working hard to pass the MCAT; it helps build confidence."



"With its many questions, easy to follow format, instant feedback and its critical diagnostics, it allows the user to strategize a game plan on how and where to focus his/her efforts when studying"





MCAT Practice Online

Select Test Options



Practice Test
Home



Discussion
Board



Update Your
Profile



Help



How is the
MCAT Scored?



Writing
Samples



Logout



Practice Test 8

Customize the delivery of your test
by clicking your desired options below.

▶ Click Here to Start Your Test

Timing	Deliver the Questions	Self Diagnosis	Solutions	Difficulty
<input type="radio"/> On <input checked="" type="radio"/> Off	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Sequential <input type="radio"/> Random	<input checked="" type="radio"/> On <input type="radio"/> Off	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Show <input type="radio"/> Do Not Show	<input checked="" type="radio"/> All <input type="radio"/> Easy <input type="radio"/> Moderate <input type="radio"/> Difficult
Deliver the Following				
<input checked="" type="radio"/> Entire Test				
<input type="radio"/> Only the Physical Sciences Questions				
<input type="radio"/> Only the Verbal Reasoning Questions				
<input type="radio"/> Only the Biological Sciences Questions				
<input type="radio"/> Only the Writing Samples				
<input type="radio"/> Customize by Content				
<input type="radio"/> Customize by Skill				
<input type="radio"/> Customize by Passage				

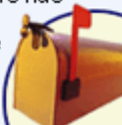
Where Are My Test Results?

Welcome to the new MCAT Practice Online. [Click here](#) to view results on the old site.



Feedback

[Click here](#) to provide feedback on MCAT Practice Online



Where Are My Test Results?

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Feedback

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Deliver the Following

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Entire Test | <input type="radio"/> Only the Writing Samples |
| <input type="radio"/> Only the Physical Sciences Questions | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Customize by Content |
| <input type="radio"/> Only the Verbal Reasoning Questions | <input type="radio"/> Customize by Skill |
| <input type="radio"/> Only the Biological Sciences Questions | <input type="radio"/> Customize by Passage |

Customize by Content

Select All

Deselect All

Physical Sciences- General Chemistry

- ☒ Acids and bases
- ☒ Bonding
- ☒ Electrochemistry
- ☒ Electronic structure & periodic table
- ☒ Kinetics & equilibrium
- ☒ Phases & phase equilibria
- ☒ Solution chemistry
- ☒ Stoichiometry
- ☒ Thermodynamics & thermochemistry

Physical Sciences- Physics

- ☒ Atomic & nuclear structure
- ☒ Electrostatics & electromagnetism
- ☒ Electronic circuits
- ☒ Equilibrium & momentum
- ☒ Fluids & solids
- ☒ Force & motion gravitation
- ☒ Light & geometrical optics

Biological Sciences- Organic Chemistry

- ☒ Amines
- ☒ Biological molecules
- ☒ Hydrocarbons
- ☒ Organic covalent bonding
- ☒ Oxygen-containing compounds
- ☒ Separations & purifications
- ☒ Use of spectroscopy in structural identification

Biological Sciences- Biology

- ☒ Circulatory, lymphatic, immune systems
- ☒ Digestive, excretory system
- ☒ Molecular Biology: DNA and protein synthesis
- ☒ Enzymes & cellular metabolism
- ☒ Molecular Biology: Eukaryotes
- ☒ Evolution
- ☒ Generalized eukaryotic cells
- ☒ Genetics
- ☒ Microbiology

Passage I

There are two ways by which the spirit of a culture may be shriveled. In the first—the Orwellian—culture becomes a prison. In the second—the Huxleyan—culture becomes a burlesque. No one needs to be reminded that our world [has been] marred by many prison cultures whose structure Orwell described accurately in his parables. If one were to read both *1984* and *Animal Farm* . . . one would have a fairly precise blueprint of the machinery of thought control as it [recently operated] in scores of countries and on millions of people. . . .

What Huxley teaches [in his novel *Brave New World*] is that in the age of advanced technology, spiritual devastation is more likely to come from an enemy with a smiling face than from one whose countenance exudes suspicion and hate. In the Huxleyan prophecy, Big Brother does not watch us, by his choice. We watch him, by ours. . . . When, in short, a people become an audience and their public business a vaudeville act, then a nation finds itself at risk; culture death is a clear possibility.

In [the United States], Orwell's prophecies are of small relevance, but Huxley's are well under way toward being realized. For [the U.S.] is engaged in the world's most ambitious experiment to accommodate itself to the technological distractions made possible by the electric plug. This is an experiment that . . . [has] reached a perverse maturity in America's consuming love affair with television. . . . By ushering in the Age of Television, America has given the world the clearest available glimpse of the Huxleyan future.

Those who speak about this matter must often raise their voices to a near-hysterical pitch, inviting the charge that they are everything from wimps to public nuisances to Jeremiahs. But they do so because what they want others to see appears benign, when it is not invisible altogether. An Orwellian world is much easier to recognize, and to oppose, than a Huxleyan. Everything in our background has prepared us to know and resist a prison when the gates

?
Solution

☐
Guess

1. The assertion that the introduction of an alphabet changes cognitive habits is:

- ☐ A) true, on the basis of the low literacy rate in the U.S.
- ☐ B) supported by objective data in the passage.
- ☐ C) perhaps true but not explicitly supported by passage information.
- ☐ D) contradicted by the assertion that television watching is pervasive in the U.S.

?
Solution

☐
Guess

2. Which of the following findings would most *weaken* the author's argument about the extent to which U.S. society has fulfilled the Huxleyan prophecy?

- ☐ A) A high percentage of the U.S. adults who watch television regularly have a good understanding of the politics and validity of the media.
- ☐ B) A high percentage of the U.S. adults who watch television regularly failed to vote in the last presidential election.
- ☐ C) More U.S. adults are able to name the judge on the television show "The People's Court" than are able to name the U.S. chief justice.
- ☐ D) More U.S. adults have read *1984* than have read *Brave New World*.

Passage IV

Cholesterol is a structural component of plasma membranes and a precursor of steroid hormones. The typical blood cholesterol level of healthy humans is about 1.8 mg/mL.

Familial hypercholesterolemia (HC) is a disease associated with high cholesterol levels; HC affects 1 in 500 people. The cholesterol level of moderately affected individuals is about 3.0 mg/mL. Severely affected individuals have cholesterol levels around 7.0 mg/mL.

HC is relatively common in some families and absent from others. Research shows no significant difference between the dietary habits of individuals in affected and unaffected families.

Biologists believe that HC is caused by a malfunction at the plasma membrane. The cells of healthy individuals have cholesterol-containing endocytotic vesicles, whereas the cells of individuals with HC do not. A comparison of the homogenized cells reveals that individuals with HC lack a membrane protein that normally binds to a particular cholesterol-containing particle (LDL). This same protein is found in the membrane of cholesterol-containing vesicles.

12. Cholesterol is a precursor of which of the following hormones?



Solution



Guess

- ☐ A) Insulin
- ☒ B) Gastrin
- ☐ C) Thyroxin
- ☐ D) Estrogen

13. Is it reasonable to conclude that HC is caused a genetic disorder?



Solution



Guess

- ☒ A) Yes, because HC is common in certain families regardless of the type of diet they consume.
- ☐ B) ~~Yes, because HC is common in families that consume low cholesterol diets.~~
- ☐ C) ~~No, because individuals in families that consume high levels of cholesterol are more likely to acquire the disease.~~
- ☐ D) No, because HC appears to be caused by a defective protein and not a defective DNA sequence.

14. Researchers can most effectively mimic the symptoms of HC in a healthy person if they give that person a drug that:



Solution



Passage I

There are two ways by which the spirit of a culture may be shriveled. In the first—the Orwellian—culture becomes a prison. In the second—the Huxleyan—culture becomes a burlesque. No one needs to be reminded that our world [has been] marred by many prison cultures whose structure Orwell described accurately in his parables. If one were to read both *1984* and *Animal Farm* . . . one would have a fairly precise blueprint of the machinery of thought control as it [recently operated] in scores of countries and on millions of people. . . .

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In [the United States], Orwell's prophecies are of small relevance, but Huxley's are well under way toward being realized. For [the U.S.] is engaged in the world's most ambitious experiment to accommodate itself to the technological distractions made possible by the electric plug. This is an experiment that . . . [has] reached a perverse maturity in America's consuming love affair with television. . . . By ushering in the Age of Television, America has given the world the clearest available glimpse of the Huxleyan future.

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Solution



Guess

1. The assertion that the introduction of an alphabet changes cognitive habits is:

☐ A) true, on the basis of the low literacy rate in the U.S.

The author makes no reference to the literacy rate in the U.S. or whether it is low or high, so no determination on whether this is true can be made here.

☐ B) supported by objective data in the passage.

This assertion is made in one sentence without elaboration or objective data. The main body of the passage is devoted to the impact of technology, in particular, television, on culture and does not further discuss the impact of introducing the alphabet.

☐ C) perhaps true but not explicitly supported by passage information.

This assertion is introduced in the context of the larger point being made in the paragraph about television's revolutionary impact on society, which was as great, perhaps even greater, than introduction of the alphabet. The assertion functions to set up a comparison, so the author's assertion must be assumed to be perhaps true in order for the point made about television's revolutionary impact to be convincing.

☐ D) contradicted by the assertion that television watching is pervasive in the U.S.

Message I

series of chemical reactions was carried out to study the chemistry of lead.

Reaction 1

Initially, 15.0 mL of 0.300 M $\text{Pb}(\text{NO}_3)_2(aq)$ was mixed with 15.0 mL of 0.300 M $\text{Na}_2\text{SO}_4(aq)$. All the $\text{Pb}(\text{NO}_3)_2$ reacted to form Compound A, a white precipitate. Compound A was removed by filtration.

Reaction 2

Next, 15.0 mL of 0.300 M $\text{KI}(aq)$ was added to Compound A. The mixture was agitated and some of Compound A dissolved. In addition, a yellow precipitate of $\text{PbI}_2(s)$ was formed.

Reaction 3

$\text{PbI}_2(s)$ was separated and mixed with 15.0 mL of 0.300 M $\text{Na}_2\text{CO}_3(aq)$. A white precipitate of $\text{PbCO}_3(s)$ formed. All of the $\text{PbI}_2(s)$ was converted into $\text{PbCO}_3(s)$.

Reaction 4

$\text{PbCO}_3(s)$ was removed by filtration and a small sample gave off a gas when treated with dilute HCl .

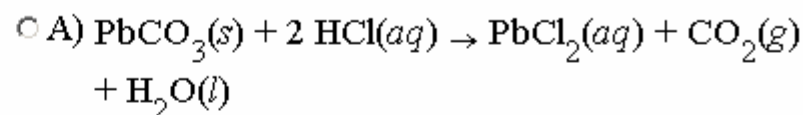


Solution



Guess

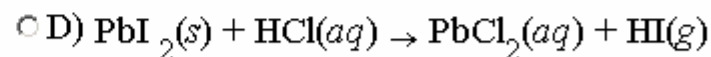
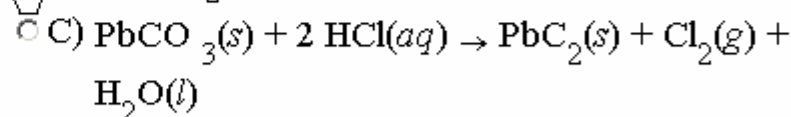
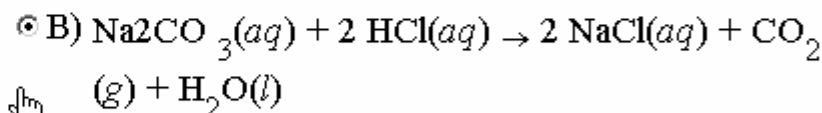
1. Which of the following reactions depicts the formation of the gas in Reaction 4?



Reaction 4 is shown in the following equation, which is answer choice A.



Answers B and D do not show a reaction involving $\text{PbCO}_3(s)$, as required by Reaction 4. Answer C shows an implausible and unbalanced equation. Thus, answer choice A is the best answer.



I missed this question because I...

had difficulty with the concepts

2. The identity of Compound A is:

MCAT Practice Test 8
Review Screen

Verbal Reasoning

	Question Number		I Missed This Question Because...
?	1	C	
	2	C	did not know the answer
	3	C	
	4	C	had difficulty with the concepts
	5	C	did not know the vocabulary
?	6	C	did not know the answer
?	7	C	
	8	C	had difficulty with the concepts
	9	C	
	10	C	misread the question
	11	C	made an easy question more difficult
	12	C	missed words like except, not, least
	13	C	did not read all of the options carefully
	14	C	missed important information
	15	C	failed to see relationships in material
?	16	C	did not calculate correctly
?	17	C	
	18	C	
	19	C	
	20	C	
	21	C	
?	22	C	
?	23	C	
	24	C	

Legend

? = guess

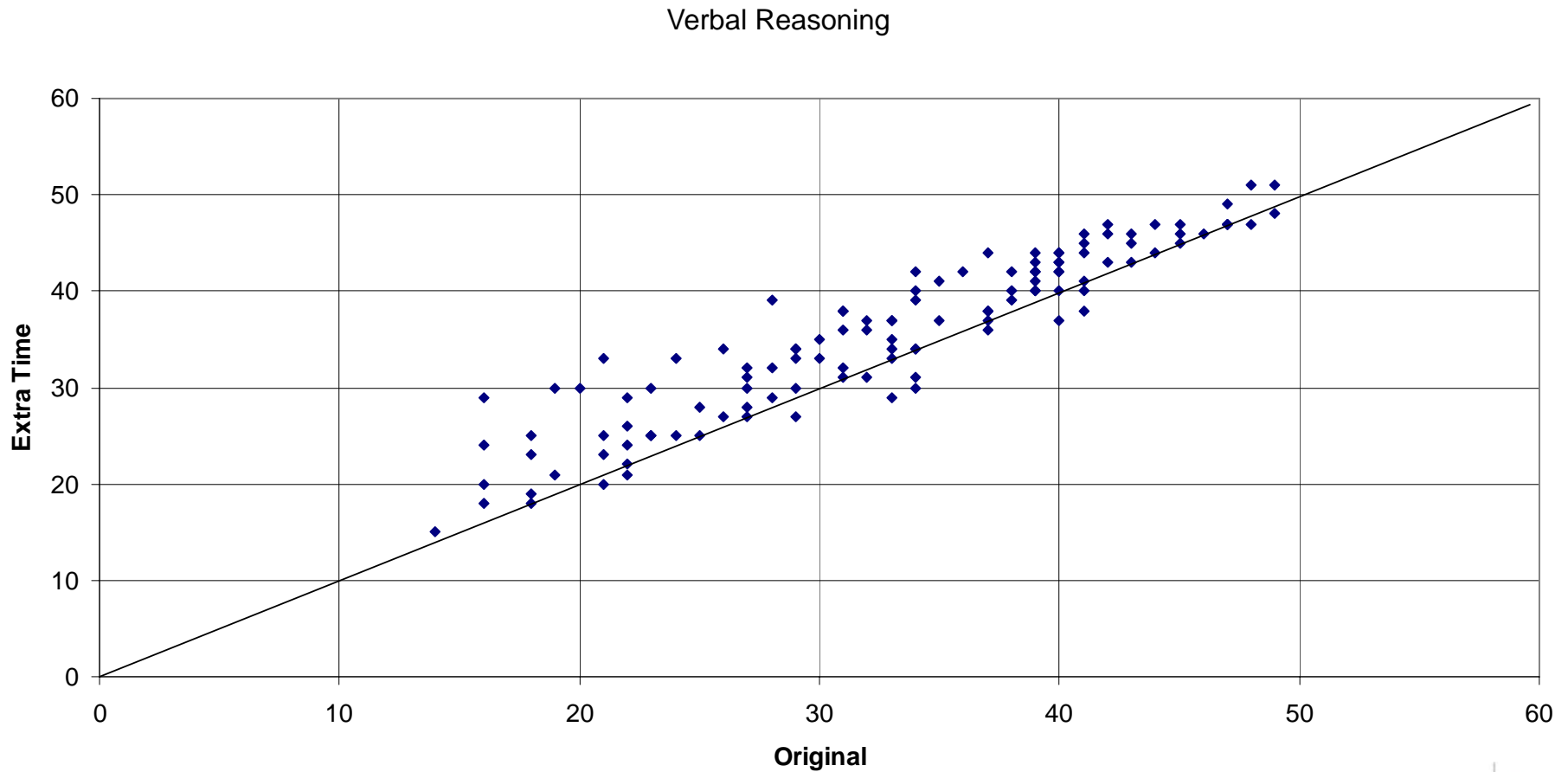
○ = unanswered



Go to
Question

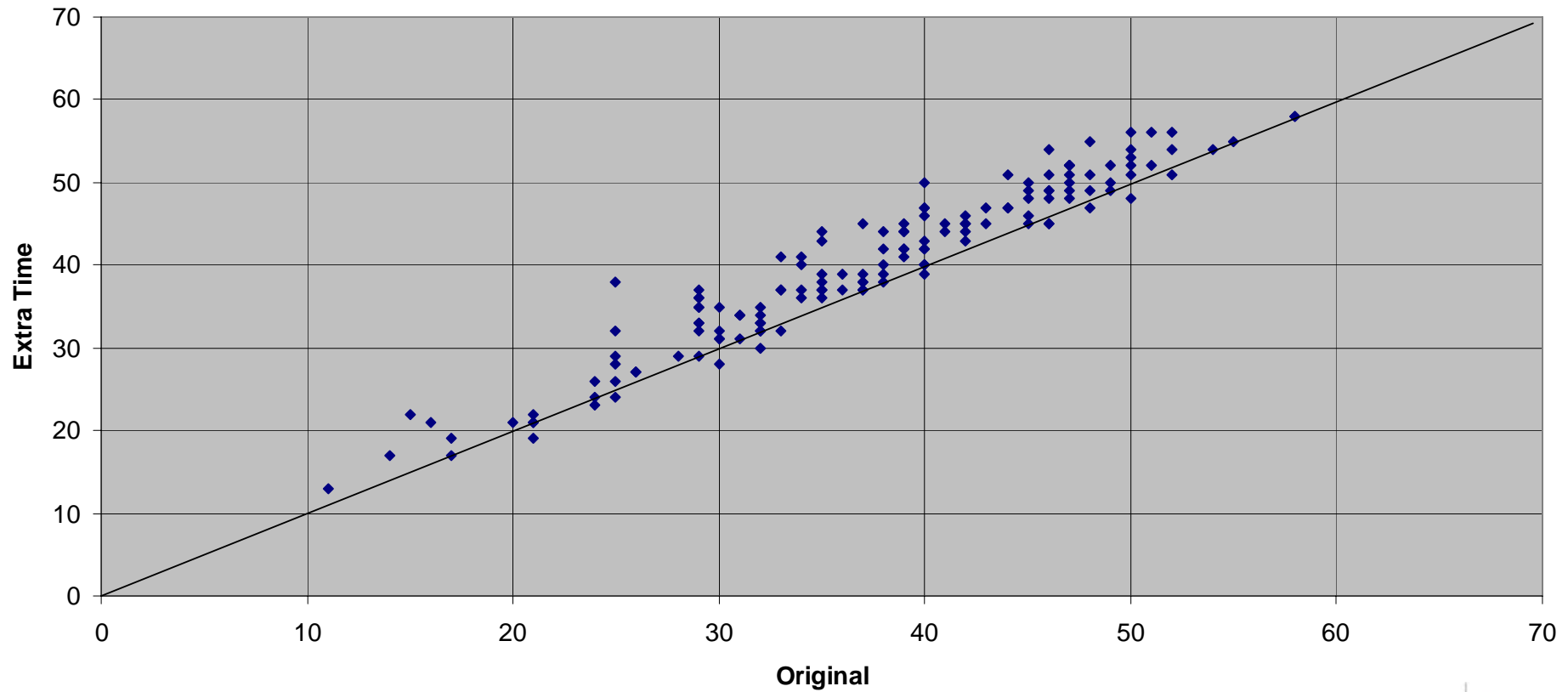
How speeded is the MCAT?

VR Gain (# right score)



PS Gain (# right score)

Physical Sciences



Gain from extra time

**Non-disabled
Students
Granted an
Unexpected
Extra ½ time**

CHANGE in Scaled Score	N	%
-2	3	3%
-1	6	5%
0	44	37%
1	39	33%
2	18	15%
3	6	5%
4	2	1%

**Mean
0.75**

**55%
improved**

How can I improve my score?

Average Gains From Retesting

On average, retesters (Apr->Aug) gain:

0.4 in PS

0.6 in VR

0.7 in BS

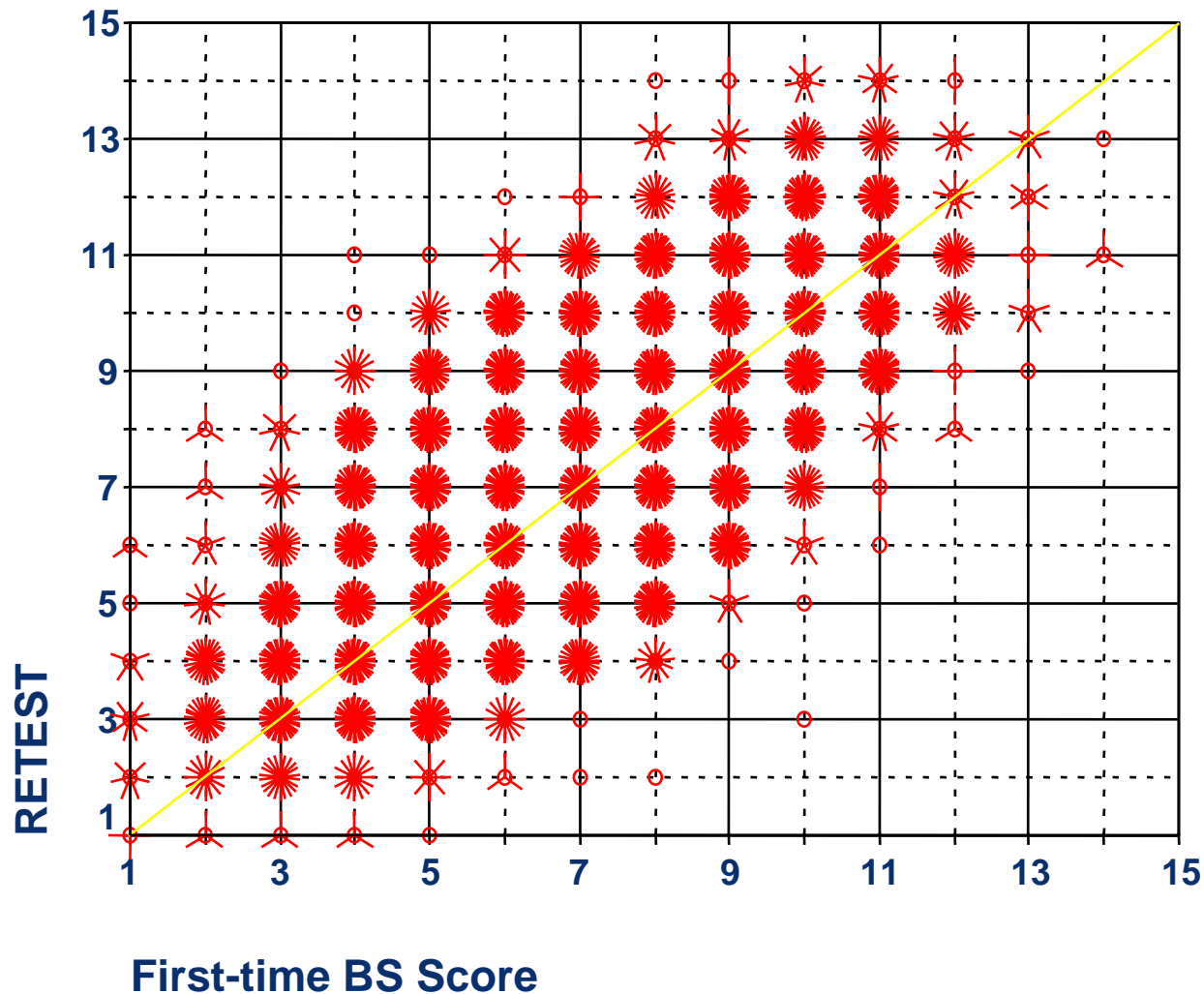
no gain on WS



Lower initial score  larger retest gain

Higher initial score  smaller retest gain

Change in MCAT Scores on Retest



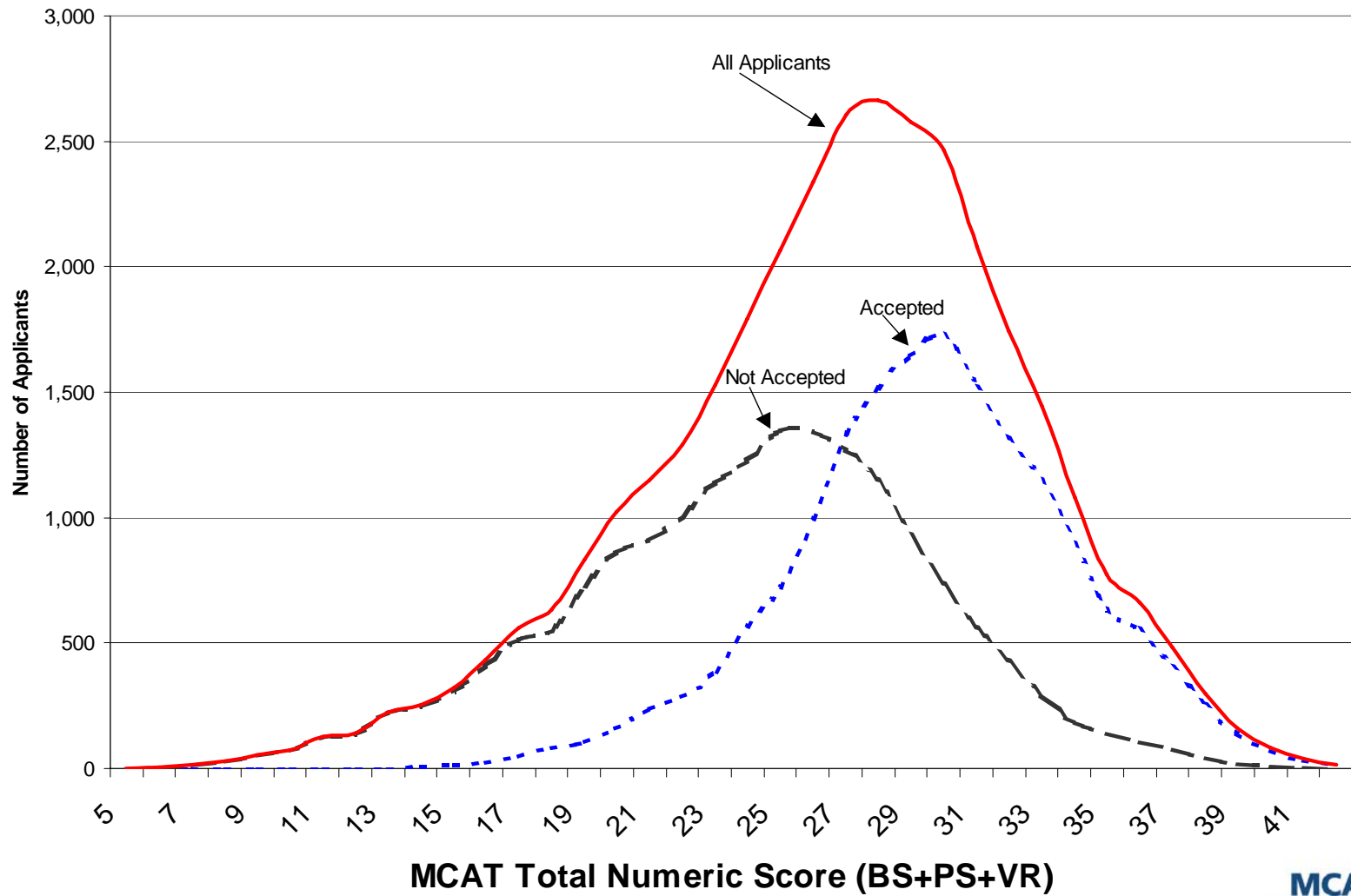
Gains From Test Prep Courses

	Took a Course Between Apr & Aug	Took <u>1st</u> Course Between Apr & Aug
Biological Sciences	.2	.4
Physical Sciences	.1	.3
Verbal Reasoning	.1	.2
Writing Sample	0	0

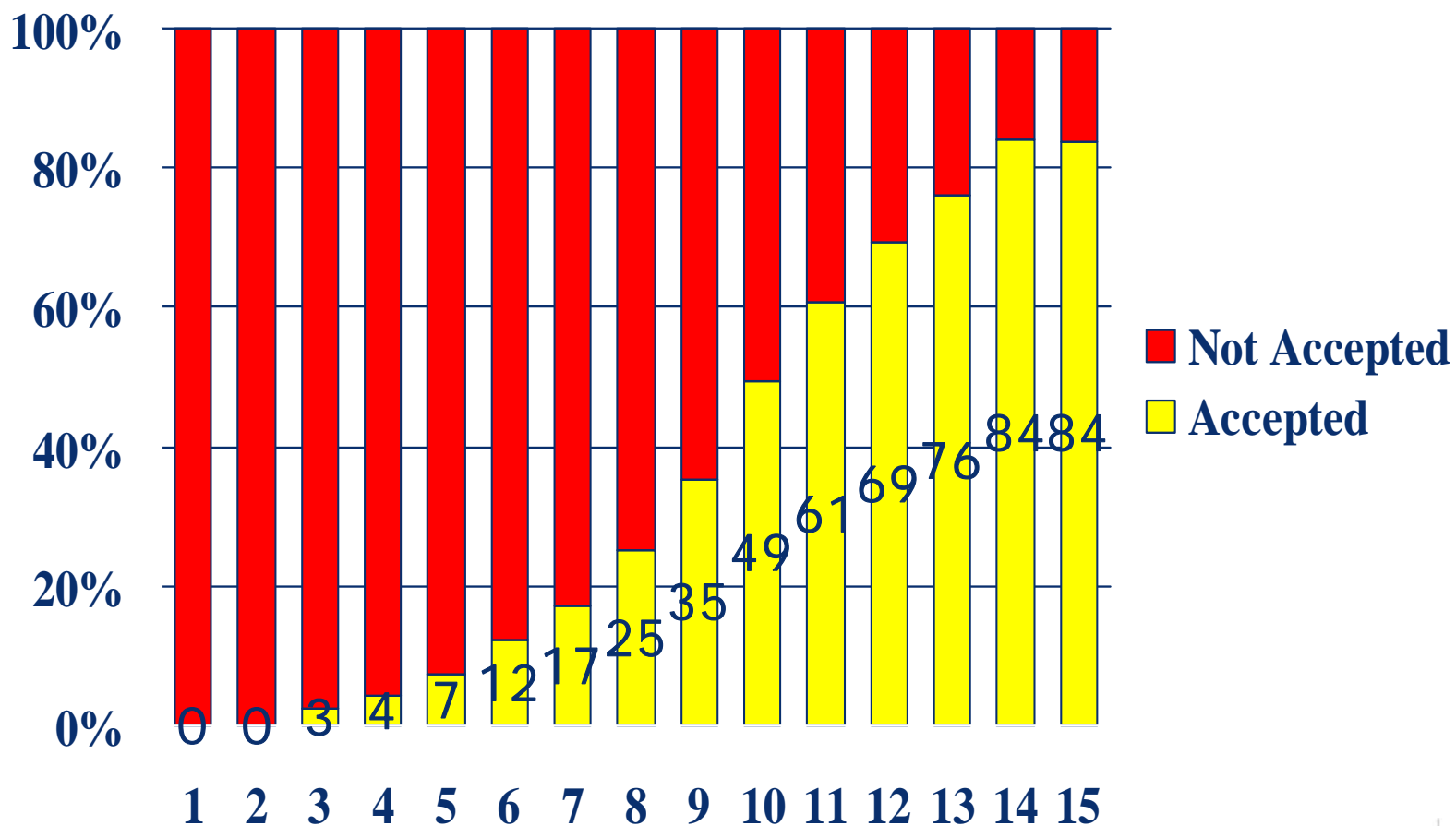
Expected gain after controlling for initial score,
gender, race and other preparation methods.

Who Gets In?

Applicants



Percent Accepted: BS





Tomorrow's Doctors, Tomorrow's Cures

Learn

Serve

Lead

Association of
American Medical Colleges