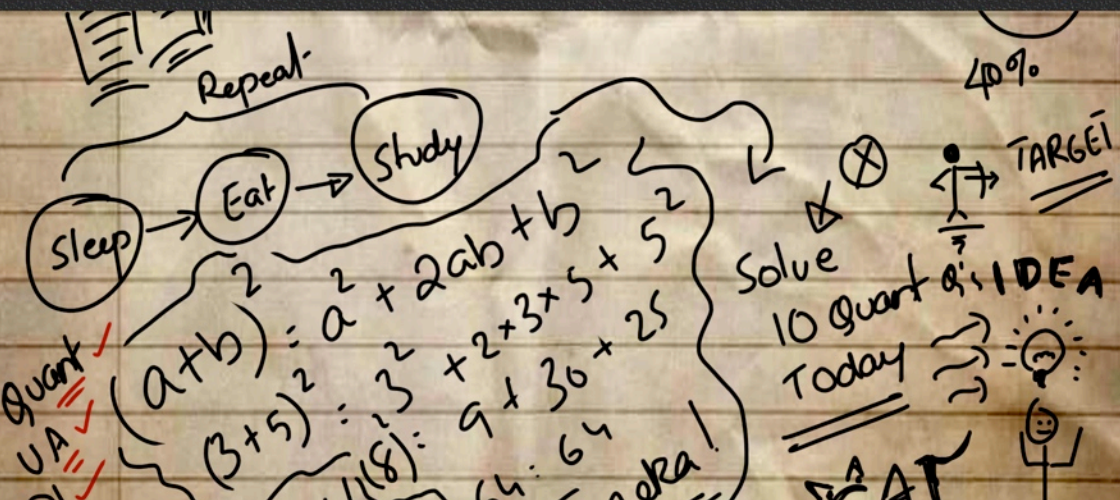




Compiled from the posts of successful MBA students & PaGaLGuY.com users from the discussion thread 'All I wanted to speak about CAT'



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Insanely different





# **The Best of** **All I wanted to speak about CAT** **Version 2.1 - 2010 Edition**

By **PaGaLGuY.com**

(Version November 7, 2010)

Compiled from the posts of successful MBA students and  
PaGaLGuY.com users from the discussion thread  
'All I Wanted to speak about CAT' on

[www.pagalguy.com/allaboutcat](http://www.pagalguy.com/allaboutcat)

**Special copy prepared exclusively for**  
**Anupam Shrivastava**

*(This is the 24,484th copy of the book)*

**The Best Of**  
**All I wanted to Speak About CAT**  
**Version 2.1 - 2010 Edition**

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## Table of Contents

<b><i>Preface to the second edition</i></b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b><i>The BabelFish of this book</i></b> .....	<b>11</b>
Glossary	
<b><i>Aniket Khasgiwale</i></b> <b>NEW</b> .....	<b>17</b>
Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad	
Class of 2010-12	
<b><i>Shiva Prasad</i></b> <b>NEW</b> .....	<b>22</b>
Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad	
Class of 2009-11	
<b><i>Mahesh Ramasubramanian</i></b> <b>NEW</b> .....	<b>29</b>
Indian Institute of Management, Lucknow	
Class of 2009-11	
<b><i>Shreyans Shrimali</i></b> <b>NEW</b> .....	<b>36</b>
Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad	
Class of 2012	
<b><i>Srikanth Sharma</i></b> <b>NEW</b> .....	<b>39</b>
XLRI School of Business and Human Resources, Jamshedpur	
Class of 2009-11	
<b><i>Rohit Gupta</i></b> <b>NEW</b> .....	<b>45</b>
Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad	
Class of 2012	
<b><i>Amarendra Gorai</i></b> <b>NEW</b> .....	<b>54</b>
Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode Class of 2010-12	

<b>Anuj Mahajan</b> <span style="background-color: red; color: white; padding: 2px;">NEW</span> .....	<b>59</b>
Management Development Institute, Gurgaon PGPIM	
Class of 2010-12	
<b>Varun Ramamurthy</b> <span style="background-color: red; color: white; padding: 2px;">NEW</span> .....	<b>64</b>
Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta	
Class of 2010-12	
<b>Purnachandra Rao Duggirala</b> .....	<b>69</b>
Indian Institute of Management, Indore	
Class of 2004-06	
<b>Anupam Majumdar</b> .....	<b>81</b>
Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore	
Class of 2006-08	
<b>Deepa Swaminathan</b> .....	<b>97</b>
Mudra Institute of Communications, Ahmedabad	
Class of 2004-06	
<b>Amit Agarwal</b> .....	<b>101</b>
Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta	
Batch of 2008-10	
<b>KIMSTER</b> .....	<b>113</b>
Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, New Delhi	
Class of 2007-09	
<b>Raghu (Surreptitious)</b> .....	<b>117</b>
Institute of Management Technology, Ghaziabad	
Class of 2008-10	
<b>Vijay Bhaskar</b> .....	<b>124</b>
Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad	
Class of 2009-11	

<b><i>Himanshu Nigam</i>.....</b>	<b>133</b>
Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode	
Class of 2008-10	
<b><i>Sumit Bedi</i>.....</b>	<b>143</b>
Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore	
Class of 2008-10	
<b><i>Niranjan Prabhakar</i> .....</b>	<b>156</b>
XLRI School of Business and Human Resources, Jamshedpur	
Class of 2007-09	
<b><i>Soham Bandopadhyay</i>.....</b>	<b>161</b>
Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta	
Class of 2008-10	
<b><i>Rushikesh Humbe</i>.....</b>	<b>171</b>
Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad	
Class of 2006-08	
<b><i>Govar Balakrishnan</i> .....</b>	<b>181</b>
Indian Institute of Management, Indore	
Class of 2004-06	
<b><i>Praveen Kusnoor</i> .....</b>	<b>185</b>
Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies, Mumbai	
Class of 2008-10	
<b><i>Tripurari Prasad</i> .....</b>	<b>190</b>
Indian Institute of Management, Shillong	
Class of 2008-10	
<b><i>Ajith B Prasad</i> .....</b>	<b>197</b>
Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode	
Class of 2008-10	

<b><i>Harshad Karandikar</i> .....</b>	<b>202</b>
Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode	
Class of 2008-10	
<b><i>Mahesh Chayel</i> .....</b>	<b>229</b>
Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta	
Class of 2008-10	
<b><i>Madhav Nayak</i> .....</b>	<b>235</b>
SP Jain Institute of Management and Research, Mumbai	
Class of 2005-07	




## Preface to the second edition

Welcome to the Second Edition of **The Best of All I Wanted to Speak About CAT**.

This edition aims to be an able sequel to the First Edition, which after its release on June 18, 2009, was downloaded a total of **42,417** times at the time of writing this preface. Of this number, 1,479 books were sent as gifts. Each of the 42,417 people received a personalized copy with their names written on it, just like the one you are reading right now.

### What's new?

We've made substantial additions and changes to this edition of the book, the biggest of which is the addition of nine new success stories. That takes the total count of stories in the book to 28. The new stories have been marked with the icon  in the Table of Contents and the chapters.

Between the First Edition and the Second, the CAT exam underwent a profound change from being a paper-pencil test to one that was computer-based. However, it's interesting to note that this change has hardly affected the way successful CAT crackers approach their preparation. You can observe this by comparing the stories of the 2010 IIM admits with those who received their admits in or before 2009.

The book also sports a new design. We replaced the Bookman Old Style font with the Baskerville font to improve the reading experience. If you are using Windows, [turning on 'Cleartype'](#) might improve it even more.

The stories for this edition were compiled and edited by Lajwanti D'souza. Her mammoth effort adds to that of Shivangi Narayan and

Pooja Lapasia, the editing duo of the First Edition. The cover has been designed by Sreeraman MG, while the technology behind bringing you a personalized edition is the work of Devadatta Sahoo.

## **About this book**

The Internet has the unique ability to bring out the inherent goodness within people in ways no other environment can. Everyday, millions of strangers join hands virtually to create something that is bigger than the sum of them all.

Every year, hundreds of thousands of young students and professionals take a crack at the Common Admission Tests (CAT), the prime channel to secure admission into the Master of Business Administration (MBA) programmes of the Indian Institutes of Management and a few other top Indian Business Schools. Less than five thousand actually manage to make it.

This book is a compilation of the MBA entrance test preparation experiences of the successful few between 2004 and now, who took time out to write detailed chronicles of their tryst with getting through into a top MBA school on the PaGaLGuY.com MBA Forums. These are poignant stories of longing, small triumphs followed by large setbacks, dreams shattered and then rejuvenated, sheer hard work, winning attitudes and sucking victory from the jaws of defeat.

Read the stories to know what it takes to get into a top MBA school in India, when everything goes wrong and when luck deserts you. Or whenever you feel uninspired, read your favourite story from this book to get back into the groove and crack that tough Quant problem.

For the sake of not taking away from the chutzpah of the original posts, we have performed minimal language editing to the book. Do

not be shocked if you find grammatical mistakes, Internet slang, a little bit of Hindi and some political incorrectness in there. Trust me, you wouldn't enjoy these stories any other way.

To make reading easier, we have included a Glossary of PaGaLGuY-speak in the beginning of the book.

In this first edition of The Best of All I Wanted to Speak About CAT, we have only included the best stories of successful MBA aspirants who made it to the IIMs and a few other top b-schools. In future editions, where we shall include stories of a lot more people from more backgrounds.

In many stories, you will find the writers praising PaGaLGuY.com to no end. While the fact remains that PaGaLGuY (quite probably) deserves (make it definitely) that praise, this book is not meant to be a surrogate plug for PaGaLGuY.com. We obviously couldn't have selectively edited out the praise phrases (phraises?) and still kept the gist of the stories intact.

A big thank you to everyone who contributed to the [All I wanted to Speak About CAT](#) thread on PaGaLGuY.com. A special thanks to the Moderators on PaGaLGuY – especially prem\_ravi (Prem), rmbt (Rajat), nikhilkulk (Nikhil), Maverick (Anil) and Oxymoron (Girish) who helped keep the sacred discussion thread clean and immensely valuable to lakhs of MBA aspirants.

See you in the third edition.

**Apurv Pandit**  
**Editor, PaGaLGuY.com**  
**November, 2010**

## The BabelFish of this book

### Glossary

A beginner's guide to PaGaLGuYSpeak

Like any counterculture, the online community of PaGaLGuY.com has developed their own set of peculiar words, which the Oxford Dictionary is going to absorb in the year 2018. That last sentence was a lie. Oxford Press has promised to do no such thing. However, you need to absorb just a little bit of these words and their meanings to truly appreciate some parts of 'All I Wanted to Speak about CAT'.

You may gloss through these words before reading the book, or refer to them on demand. Although the method we really recommend (for best results, as they say) is to print this Glossary on clean A4-size paper, crumple the printouts into a ball and swallow it with two glasses of wheatgrass lemonade. On second thoughts, please don't.

#### **CAT test-preparation coaching institutes**

**T.I.M.E.:** Triumphant Institute of Management Education, a popular MBA entrance test preparation institute

**CL or Career Launcher:** a test preparation institute based in New Delhi but with a pan-India presence

**IMS or IMS Learning Resources:** one of the larger test preparation institutes of India

**PT or Professional Tutorials:** a test preparation coaching institute

**Mock Cats, MOCK CATS, mock cats:** different aliases for simulated versions of the CAT exam, meant to provide the actual

feel of the exam environment to prepare oneself for the actual CAT exam.

**AIMCAT, AIM CAT, AIMs:** The brand name of the practice/mock CAT tests offered by T.I.M.E., a test preparation coaching agency.

**SIM CAT, Sims, SIMS:** The brand name of the practice/mock CAT tests offered by IMS Learning Resources, a test preparation institute.

**IMS BRM:** 'Basic Reference Material' - textbooks on elementary math, English and data interpretation offered by IMS Learning Resources.

### **Team-based Study Groups on PaGaLGuY.com**

**BBLT:** Bol Bachan Losers team - one of the many teams formed on PaGaLGuY.com every year, centered around the CAT exam. The team is based on the manifesto, “BBLT is a team of the have-nots, by the have-nots and for the have-nots. Not that the contenders of this team don't have (what) it (takes to crack the CAT) in them. It is just that they are yet to (but hope to eventually) translate potential to performance.”

**UDT:** Under Dogs Team - a team of CAT takers formed every year on PaGaLGuY.com around the manifesto, “A UDT member should not have ranked in top 100 of a mock/practice CAT test. more than a maximum of one time. At the same time, he or she should have great motivation to do well in CAT and show PG that he or she can bell the CAT.”

**DT:** Dream Team - a team of CAT takers formed every year on PaGaLGuY, consisting of people who have consistently been scoring very high or appearing in the Top 100 list of a mock/practice CAT

test organized by various test preparation institutes. Players of the Dream Team have traditionally had a reputation of making it to the absolute top 10 b-schools of India.

### **Relating to areas tested for in the CAT exam**

**DI/LR:** Data Interpretation / Logical Reasoning - one of the three main areas tested for in most management entrance exams in India.

**PJ:** (not to be confused with Poor Jokes) Paragraph jumbles or para jumbles - a typical format of questions in English usage wherein 4-5 sentences are to be arranged to form a coherent paragraph.

**FIJs:** Fact Inference Judgement - a format of English usage questions wherein three sentences are to be identified as factual, inferential or opinionated based on their individual meanings.

**EU/RC:** English Usage and Reading Comprehension - one of the three important areas tested for of the CAT exam.

### **Of services offered on PaGaLGuY.com**

**QQAD:** The Quant Question a Day - an extremely popular service on PaGaLGuY.com, wherein those subscribed get a sufficiently tough Quantitative Ability question in their email every morning. The subscribers then dissect various ways of solving the question on the PaGaLGuY Forums, thereby making for collaborative learning. The answer to the question is sent along with the next day's question.

**SB:** Shout box - the community chatroom on the PaGaLGuY Forum homepage ([www.pagalguy.com/forum](http://www.pagalguy.com/forum))

**PG:** Depending on the context, it may mean PaGaLGuY.com, or the person who founded PaGaLGuY.com, or Post Graduate, or Paying Guest accommodation.

**id:** the username used to post on PaGaLGuY.com

### **Words related to MBA entrance exams**

**CAT:** Common Admissions Test, the toughest entrance exam in the world, used primarily to select students who shall join the coveted Indian Institutes of Management for the MBA courses.

**TR no:** Test Registration number, the unique identity number give to every CAT taker.

**CGPA:** Cumulative Grade Point Average - an internationally prevalent method to calculate performance across a degree course at a university or college

**XAT:** Xavier Admission Test, the entrance exam organized by the Xavier's Labour Relations Institute, Jamshedpur. The XAT score is used by a lot of other b-schools, largely belonging to the Xavier-branded institutions.

**JMET:** Joint Management Entrance Test, the management entrance test held and accepted by management schools belonging to the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs).

**AIR:** All India Rank, as in a competitive exam.

**WL:** Wait list of a college's final admission list, not too different from WLs in railway booking.

**C-day:** CAT day, the day of reckoning when you appear for the CAT exam.

**GD-PI:** Group Discussion and Personal Interview

## **Related to Business Schools and their nicknames**

**WIMWI:** 'Well-known Institute of Management in West India'. A fond nickname for the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Ahmedabad.

**IIM:** Indian Institute of Management

**IIM Ahmedabad or simply A:** IIM Ahmedabad

**IIM Bangalore or B:** IIM Bangalore

**IIM Calcutta or C:** IIM Calcutta

**IIMI or I:** IIM Indore

**IIMK or K:** IIM Kozhikode

**IIM Lucknow or L:** IIM Lucknow

**IIMS or S:** IIM Shillong

Consequently,

**BLACKIS:** IIMs at Bangalore, Lucknow, Ahmedabad, Calcutta, Kozhikode, Indore and Shillong. So when someone says 'I got BLACKIS', it means that they received interview calls from all the IIMs at the above places.

**XLRI:** Xavier Labour Relations Institute, Jamshedpur

**MDI:** Management Development Institute, Gurgaon

**IIFT:** Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, Delhi

**SJM SOM:** Shailesh J Mehta School of Management, IIT Bombay

**NITIE:** National Institute of Industrial Engineering, Mumbai



# All I wanted to speak about CAT

# Aniket Khasgiwale

## Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad

### Class of 2010-12

NEW

**Scored 99.99 percentile in CAT 2009**



I guess it's about time I put in my 2 pence worth of CAT wisdom.

#### **Prologue - Once upon a time in Nashik and Pune.**

Most of my schooling was done in Nashik. It was there that I gave my X and XII standard exams. After my XII, I desperately wanted to get out of Nashik. Thankfully, I got into the College of Engineering, Pune and immediately took admission in the Electronics and Telecommunication department there.

I was decent at academics, with a CGPA of 8.13. However I was never really that interested in electronics, so an electronics or a software related job wasn't something that I really wanted. An MS was out of question, so I decided to go for an MBA. Quite honestly, the amazing packages that IIM graduates were getting was the major reason for this. Also, after visiting IIT Bombay during Mood Indigo, I started feeling bad that I did not make it to an IIT. It was then that I decided that I would do my MBA from an IIM Ahmedabadnd nowhere else.

## **Chapter 1 - Fear Proof**

I joined IMS Pune for CAT 2008. This was because they had a special “Apex” batch, where they would club together the best of students who would be taught by the best of teachers. I really learned a lot here. The faculty was pretty good and the classes were very useful as the level of questions was pretty high as compared to the ordinary classes. I was also performing well in my Mocks and was pretty confident of cracking CAT. Maybe I was overconfident. Hence after getting a job in a software company, I did not take the entrance test of any other high paying 'core electronics' company, as I was very sure that I would be joining an IIM the next year. I wasn't even planning on writing any other MBA entrance test. Heh.

## **Chapter 2 - From Dreams till Dust**

I took the CAT on November 16, 2008 - what turned out to be the last paper-based CAT. I thought I had done pretty well and went to my class looking for answers to the questions. It was there that I realised that I had screwed up DI. Not a major screw-up, but bad enough to ensure that I wouldn't get a call from IIM Ahmedabad or IIM Calcutta. Realising this, I took the XAT just to have more choice. And sure enough my predictions came true. I had just one call - IIM Kozhikode. And yeah, I also had an IIM Lucknow Agri-Business Management call. XAT went well and I had an XLRI BM call as well. Things were starting to look up.

My CAT 2008 score was,

VA: 99.8 percentile

QA: 96.5 percentile

DI: 93.67 percentile

Overall : 99.59 percentile

XAT: 99.97 percentile

## **Chapter 3 – Interviews**

My IIM Kozhikode interview was bad. I barely answered anything and was out in no time. However my IIM Lucknow ABM interview went well. It was a bit of a joke really, I convinced the interviewers that I had an uncle who owned a winery in Nashik because of which I wanted to study ABM. My XLRI interview was good, and I was hoping to get through. Then came the results: XLRI reject followed by IIM Kozhikode reject. I was stunned. I felt like a complete failure. I still remember that day - my dad had called to console me and I was about to cry in the middle of the street.

For the first time in my life, I had failed at something that I had worked so hard for. I didn't check my IIM Lucknow ABM result till a few days later. And I had made it, I had converted my call! However, by then I had decided that I would take the CAT again. A lot of people advised me to join IIM Lucknow - arguing that the placements were similar to the main course. But an MBA is like a marriage - you do it only once. And I didn't want my MBA to be in Agri-Business Management. My teachers tried to talk me out of it - saying that there's no guarantee that I could crack the CAT again. However, deep inside I knew for sure that I would crack it the next time. After all, the CAT and I had some unfinished business.

## **Chapter 4 - Grindhouse**

I started studying for CAT 2009 in all earnestness. I joined Byju Sir's classes. I really had fun in the classes and they helped boost my confidence. I also started working (in a job). Thankfully, the rigours of the job were never such that I didn't get time for my studies. However, I skipped everything else - the million parties, movies etc. that my office gang would go for. I had just one goal - cracking the CAT. The best part about studying for CAT was that I loved doing it. Therefore I rarely felt bored by studying, this helped me study more and helped increase my confidence. I was confident about myself this

time and nothing could shake my confidence - not the shift to an online pattern, not my moderate Mock CAT scores and not even the fact that a lot might depend on the type of questions that I would get. I knew I would get through irrespective of that. So I wrote my CAT on December 7, 2009. It went well and I was hoping for the best.

## **Chapter 5 - True Brilliance**

February 28, 2010: I was home. The CAT 2009 result was declared! But I couldn't access the site. Finally my friend got through, and he mailed me my result. I saw it - 99.99 percentile. I had done it! I was rolling on the floor, laughing in disbelief and joy. I had nailed the CAT!

My CAT 2009 score was,

VA: 99.80 percentile

QA: 96.95 percentile

DI: 100 percentile

Overall: 99.99

## **Chapter 6 - Natural Born (IIM) Student**

I had five IIM Calls - BLACK. Also had two FMS calls (MBA and MBA-MS). Hence I was roaming all over the country for my GDs and PIs. Some went well (C,K) some were okay (L) while some were bad (A, B, FMS). But all this while, I felt good. I knew I was going to make it. Also, I had learned a lot more about being an MBA. It was not just a means to obtain a fat package - it was much, much more than that. I came to know more about what students actually do at the IIMs, how their life is and how an MBA makes an impact on their lives. And I really wanted to be a part of it. And I knew that I deserved to be a part of it. Almost as if it was meant to be.

## **Epilogue - Joka Crown**

April 25, 2010: I have converted both my IIM Calcutta calls (PGP and PGPCM). No other results have been declared, but I am more than happy with what I have. I will be starting my MBA journey soon at one of India's best colleges - the dream has finally come true. The year long wait, the efforts put in, the countless mocks, my rejecting IIM Lucknow ABM - it was all worth it. I have finally done it. All it needed was a strong self-belief, sharp focus, great will power and a lot of fun while studying.

## **Update**

I have converted my IIM Ahmedabad call and have decided to study there and not at IIM Calcutta.

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# Shiva Prasad

## Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad

### Class of 2009-11

NEW

**Scored 99.76 percentile in CAT 2008**

Before I begin my CAT story. This is my profile,

X: 93.44 (Karnataka State Board)

XII: 90.16 (Karnataka State Board)

B.E: 77.8 (Visvesvaraya Technological University, Sri Jayachamarajendra College of Engineering, Electronics and Communication branch)

My CAT 2008 percentile was,

DI: 98.11

Quant: 97.84

Verbal: 99.09

Overall: 99.76

## 2005

I barely knew anything about CAT. I was wondering what the fuss about MBA was. I used to think that when we had finished XII none of us were (in my humble opinion) interested in joining B.Com, then why do some of my friends now want to study MBA? There was one guy, Spandan, who was regarded as the brainiest guy in our branch, and he started the trend of preparing for the CAT. I did not know

what I would do after finishing engineering, so I simply bought the CAT application form. Then I came to know even though CAT was a kind of aptitude test, we need some preparation. I blindly subscribed to Brilliant Tutorials. Never got interested in studying the material and did not study anything. CAT 2005 came (I was in seventh semester). I attended the test and got an overall percentile of around 65.6.

Hmmm.

Now I kind of got interested in cracking this test which had embarrassed me (there was no other reason at that time except this).

## **2006**

This time around T.I.M.E.. was conducting a scholarship test. I simply attended the test and got a scholarship. Three of us attended it: Spandan, Sharath, and I. Sharath, who was our EC branch topper and who had no inclination whatsoever for an MBA, came second in this Mysore district-level test. I was kind of shocked: how did this guy who hasn't solved any aptitude questions for practice score so high? His idea was simple; you don't need to solve every problem to arrive at the answer.

You assume the answer and see whether it turns out to be correct, and have a clear and calm mind. I had not warmed up to this concept yet. Anyway I got a 50% discount for getting the 8<sup>th</sup> rank in the test and joined T.I.M.E... I did not attend classes because I thought they were too boring. Tried to solve a few questions, but got bored as the questions in the basic study material were too easy. Still it had not occurred to me that in order to ace the CAT, you needed a plan and had to work hard to execute it.

Later, in July 2006, I joined Lucent as a software engineer and started learning new programming languages like JAVA, XML,



XSD, etc and stopped preparing for CAT. But hey, I had bought the application form again. I took CAT 2006 but as expected failed to clear any of the sectional cut-offs. Got around 89 percentile overall, but it increased my confidence. I told myself that with some amount of preparation I could be through in CAT 2007.

## **2007**

Around August, I really started thinking in terms of what I wanted to do in life. I did not like the job I was doing. Just coding something wasn't challenging enough for me. Then it dawned on me that decision making was something that I enjoyed, and CAT gave me an opportunity to get there. It made me feel that I should be serious about it. I got IMS material this time but I was still was lacking in effort. So there it went another spineless performance. Surprise of surprises, it was Quant which spoiled it. I had scored only 2 marks in Quant (shamed all the engineers) but I had 98.5 in verbal and cleared DI cut-off. So I thought I must be doing something right in these at least.

## **2008**

This is the year I told myself that I needed to study MBA, whether in an IIM or another college. One of my friends at office, Kapil, who had made it to IIM Bangalore advised me to give as many different tests (apart from CAT) as possible. I decided to write GMAT. Then I came to know about PaGaLGuY. Had never entered PG before that (the name was not appealing). But the decision to take GMAT was not planned well. I applied in March and fixed April 18 as the date. Then I underwent an ear operation and hoped to study while on medical leave. But the tablets I was taking and that bulky bandage around my ear was a nuisance. So when I took the test finally I scored just 670 (QA-51, and VA-2, was disappointed.

But GMAT proved that I was not hopeless in Quant. In fit of rage I booked another date June 6, but again there was no plan in place. This time I started contributing in the PaGaLGuY GMAT sentence correction and critical reasoning thread. I wanted to test myself. It helped a lot. I got to know a lot from the explanations of other successful guys.

June 6th came my second GMAT attempt. Scored an okay-ish score of 700 this time (QA-50, VA-34). I then decided to try my luck with ISB Hyderabad. I spent a month on writing essays and getting it reviewed by my friends (Pradeep and Spandan). I had hopes on ISB (don't know why but I had a feeling that I would go to study MBA this time. My best bet were institutes other than IIMs). But then I got rejected at ISB just two weeks before CAT 2008.

November 16, the CAT 2008 day. I had fever and couldn't sleep all night and was almost on the verge of skipping CAT (I am glad that I didn't). I was alone in the room and was very tired but somehow I mustered enough strength to reach the test centre. I got my adrenaline going by looking at some pretty faces there. The rest is history. Now I will stop boring you and take you through my strategy which may be of great help to you.

**Strategy 1:** Don't put all your eggs in one basket. Write different tests and be ready to consider other good universities apart from IIMs. This gives you a fall back option and keeps your mind relaxed and calm. This is needed to ace the CAT.

**Strategy 2:** Write GMAT. The tests teaches you to manage time. The verbal part is very good you can easily ace CAT verbal ability if you prepare for GMAT verbal. I was confident in VA because of this (I used to clear the cut-offs in mocks most of the time in VA while I failed in others). In the actual CAT, I was confident of doing well in the RC, sentence correction and critical reasoning kind of questions. I was also a great fan of short stories. Maybe analysing them helped

me inadvertently in RC. I got 3 out of 4 sentence correction questions right and got many RC questions correct.

**Strategy 3:** Attend Mock CATs, people. It is the training ground. I did not attend Mocks prior to 2008 with any sincerity and it cost me. I fared poorly in 12 of the 14 mocks that I took in 2008. Only in 2 of them I had over 97 percentile; the rest were pretty bad ranging from 60-90. But never cleared all the cut-offs in any mock (I was taking AIMCATs). But mocks are not about scoring, they are about experimenting. I experimented different strategies and finally settled on this format: the time was 50 minutes for each section. Start with the section in which I was good (VA). Then 40 minutes of Quant and then 50 minutes of DI (because I couldn't fix 50 minutes for DI, as it is sometimes more and sometimes less time consuming). Then I would come back and finish QA.

**Strategy 4:** CAT is a diligence test more than an intelligence test. You need to work towards it. I realised my forte was not hard work. I usually got serious about CAT only in the months of August or September. The questions in the basic study material were not Mock CAT or CAT-worthy. So I decided to solve previous years' mocks. I wrote in a notebook all the questions that were different, in the sense that these questions required me to know a particular concept or a formula without which I couldn't solve them.

I used to come back home after mocks and solve the questions again (I usually experimented during mocks to solve it again at home). Solving mocks was fun and more helpful than basic materials. The notes I prepared helped me solve 6 -8 CAT questions in 2008 within a reasonable time. Make your own strategy, solve as many mocks as you can.

I solved questions in CAT that were to my strength (not the ones the coaching institutes said were easy). The real CAT had many common sense questions. In the last week I solved previous CAT papers and found that I could really solve them. This gave me

confidence. Also, I compared real CAT papers from previous years. There is always some similarity when it comes to the kind of answers they pick for questions and I identified a lot of such patterns.

I like puzzle-based in LR so I solved those kind of questions a lot. I think the IMS basic material gives a good explanation for these kind of questions. The basic material on methods for solving puzzles such as those that involve arranging something, matching a profession with a person, etc, is well-presented in theme. Also, the para jumble questions are well explained in the IMS material.

## **GD-PI**

Now let me tell you what happened after writing the CAT. I got the results and came to know I had BLACKI calls. Now I searched through PaGaLGuY threads and made a list of maths and Electronics and Communications related questions (particularly telecom, my domain). I also made a list of other general questions such as “why MBA?”. I prepared answers for them asked my friends to conduct mock interviews. Attended 2 Time mock GD classes. The PaGaLGuY questions were a great help. I was asked Math questions in my IIM Ahmedabad interview that were there on my prepared list. Thanks guys, without those, I wouldn't have made it to IIMs today.

## **April 2009**

By now I was suffering from insomnia. I had seen the leaked IIM Bangalore PGP list. My name was not there. I was greatly disappointed as I thought it was one of my better interviews. Didn't sleep all night. Then came the IIM Lucknow shock (this I considered my best interview), I was rejected there too. Not even waitlisted. Then around 8.30 am came the IIM Calcutta results. Again a reject (it was a bad interview). Was totally depressed.

Then I came to know around 10 am, that IIM Ahmedabad results were going to be announced. I didn't want to see them. Didn't want another reject. But somehow mustered enough courage to open them. To my disbelief, I had made it! That was it for me. I am still in disbelief. Later, I came to know I got rejected at IIM Kozhikode from one of friends.

To all of you, my suggestion is to write the CAT for yourself not for your girlfriends or for others but for yourself. Remember, that emotions simply put pressure on you and make you weak. I would like to end it by quoting a dialogue from the movie Shawshank Redemption (something that I always used to keep saying to myself whenever I needed inspiration).

“Hope is a good thing, may be the best of things and no good thing ever dies.”

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# **Mahesh Ramasubramanian**

## **Indian Institute of Management, Lucknow Class of 2009-11**

NEW

**Scored 99.24 percentile in CAT 2008**



My CAT journey began in 2005 December. I'd heard about CAT for the very first time around then (was in my 3rd year BE). Engineering-induced sickness was at an all-time high for me and MBA seemed to offer me a radiant lucrative path away from technical stuff. I joined the IMS classroom coaching for CAT 2006 and attended a few lectures, took some tests, etc. I'd scored a couple of 90 percentile scores in the mocks and since people were of the opinion that the CAT day is a completely different ball game, I was deluded by the false hope that I'd score a kickass 99 percentile with multiple calls and get into one of the IIMs, as if they'd already readied a red carpet welcome for me. CAT 2006 only got me a 93 percentile, and that too because I managed to score decently in VA. I took XAT and FMS as well. I was surprised with a 97 percentile in XAT and that got me a call from SP Jain. The group interview there went hopelessly for me; I was the only fresher and was attending the first ever interview of my life. It seemed to me at the time though, that SP Jain would be the most important convert of my career. I obviously didn't make the

cut. My disappointment knew no bounds. Since I had screwed up my Math and DI in CAT, I felt a desperate need to pull up my socks.

Meanwhile, I joined Lehman Brothers (LB) on the IT side and after a couple of months decided to take CAT 2007. Software/IT was fine, but I wanted to be in the thick of business. I was told that coaching classes were no good and that private coaching was much better. I joined one such class for the test series, but what can I say - the students there were too bright for me. I couldn't solve as much as the others could, and I was always one of the worst performers there. Nevertheless, I decided to take a break from the class and practiced my Math and DI really hard - much more than the efforts I'd put in for CAT 2006. VA has always been my strong point and I never practiced VA at all.

Come CAT 2007 and I gave it my best shot. But even my best wasn't good enough. I got single digit marks in VA (my supposed strong point) and QA and my overall percentile was 63. I was never so ashamed of anything about myself till then. No one in my friends circle had scored so low. I kind of went into withdrawal and decided not to tell my scores to anyone. People would come and say, "Arre, bata de na yaar. Come on you wouldn't have done that badly. We know the meaning of 'bad' - you must have scored some 90 percentile and that's your definition of bad. We bet it wouldn't have gone below."

Well, unfortunately there was a big difference between 63 and 85 I decided to give up on CAT, hang my boots and continue working at LB whether I liked it or not. I was pissed at myself and did not give any other exams that year - no XAT, no FMS, no nothing.

Work started picking up in 2008 and I felt that I had a good future in the company. I'd got promoted and won an award for some achievement and was being given more responsibility to shoulder - so I decided that after the 2007 fiasco, there'd be no point even thinking

about CAT. By August, rumours were rife that LB might not survive. This was a shocking new development for the worse. Here I was, not bothered about CAT at all, and suddenly it seemed to be my only hope. I was still partially reluctant to believe that anything so dramatic like an LB bankruptcy could happen and decided to close my eyes and think it'd be dark everywhere. Luckily for me, my family and friends forced me to sign up for CAT 2008 and then I began taking mock tests with T.I.M.E.. around September - yes it was quite late to begin preparations, but this time, I just had to get out - and couldn't depend on my workplace to save me!

Since work was almost nil, I started studying in the office with some other batchmates. I decided that I'd primarily solve, re-solve, analyze and re-analyze the tests from various test series. I joined CL, IMS, Time and CF and brought back all their papers home and solved and analyzed several of them. I maintained a separate book for writing down any new questions/methods I would come across - the idea being that in the final days before CAT 2008, all I'd have to do was to revise that book. I also solved a lot of questions from Tenaday.co.in as well as some chapters from Nishith Sinha. I'd understood that self-help was going to be the best help. Still, my mock tests weren't going very great, and my scores were generally hovering around the 85-95 percentile mark. The coaching class VA answer keys used to be as irritating as there were never any explanations that made sense. Nevertheless, I put all this behind me and continued to focus on my preparation.

One thing that I'd gained so far was experience. Two CATs old and about to take a third, I realised that keeping my cool was what would work. People will tend to say and do several kinds of things. People will score amazing marks in mocks, act like they don't study at all, hail from IITs and hence score 100 percentiles in math and DI every time etc. My advice - the competition is between you and yourself only. Forget what others have to say. Never waste any time wondering what would happen if so-and-so guy were to get into IIM



Ahmedabad and you didn't get there. Don't think about the future - it can take care of itself.

Since my work environment at LB was getting quite shaky, I decided that I was going to take all the entrance tests possible. So I registered for IIFT, SNAP, XAT, JMET, FMS and NMAT. I just knew I had to escape somehow and was ready to take up any college.

Come CAT 2008 and I wanted to give it my best. I didn't think I could drop below a 63 percentile anyway however hard I tried .

After the test I knew I'd made some very silly mistakes in DI but apart from that I was largely satisfied. Come January and this is how my scorecard looked like,

Quant – 95.52 percentile  
Logic & - 86.65 percentile  
Verbal - 99.18 percentile  
Overall - 99.24 percentile

Shortlisted by: IIM Lucknow

WOOHOOO! I couldn't believe my eyes. I'd somehow managed a lone call from IIM Lucknow! My joy knew no bounds and I was relieved more than ever. I now stood a chance to be a part of the elite IIMs. But relief was soon overcome by an avalanche of self-doubt. There were people who had got six IIM Calls and had converted none. How was I going to convert just one single call? It had been a while since I'd participated in any GDs (after college), and I was never really a quizzer nor was I from an IIT. Reading some of the previous year students' experiences only scared me further. I started preparation slowly rather than steadily. Work was also slowly trickling in as LB was being taken over by Nomura and managing office work and studies was proving to be very difficult.

I also got calls from IIFT, MDI, FMS, NiTiE, SP Jain, SIBM Pune and NMIMS meanwhile, which boosted my confidence. I joined the IMS Achievers' Workshop. These 2 days were what really readied me for my GDPIs. Not that I did very well during the workshop, but I got to understand how others were doing, what they were reading/studying and what it generally means to have BLACKI calls. I found that just because people have multiple calls doesn't mean you are inferior to them in any way. Like one professor kept saying - "It doesn't matter how many calls you have in your kitty. Even a guy with a 100 calls will ultimately take up only one".

My outlook changed that day. I decided to try and convert the negative self-doubt into a positive work hard attitude. I tried to cover up as much reading as I could. Magazines such as The Economist are perfect for this. I wish I had started reading it earlier. The name is quite misleading. It's also expensive - around Rs 200 per issue, but I suggest you buy 2nd hand issues - say a week old or so, you'll get them for much cheaper. I read The Economist, India Today, Times of India and very rarely the Economic Times. Also the articles at Testfunda.com helped a lot for general knowledge.

But remember, knowledge is a vast ocean. And your interviewers are always going to know more than you. It's a tough testing period, but just relax and continue with your determination.

My IIFT GD PI went okay, but it wasn't the greatest - and I was wait-listed at IIFT Kolkata.

At FMS though, I had a blast in the GDPI and I managed to convert it. I was completely elated and felt worthy as the FMS selection procedure is one of the toughest there is.

My IIM Lucknow experience was something I won't forget so soon. My group had people mostly from the IITs and mostly with BLACKI calls. It was going to be quite competitive. I put forward

some good points in the GD and essay but my interview was a complete disaster or so I thought. The questions they had asked me were so vague and seemingly irrelevant that I felt cheated, considering that I had just one chance at the IIMs.

I also decided that I was not going to attend any more GDPIs, although people told me otherwise. They said I'd gain from the experience and stuff. As I mentioned earlier, don't give a damn to what others say. Hear them out and then do whatever you want to. No offence meant to anyone, but it didn't seem right to me to aim for an IIM but also be ready to accept an NMIMS. I did not go for the GDPIs of NiTiE, MDI, SP Jain, NMIMS or SIBM Pune.

The results day in April 2009 was a stressful day. I was hoping that my efforts would pay off. When I keyed in my details, this is what I got,

Congratulations!!!

You have been selected for admission to PGP 2009-2011 batch at IIM Lucknow.

Ohboyohboyohboy!!! My lone IIM Lucknow call and I'd converted it.

WOOOHOOOOOOOO!!! The next 2 days went in letting the news sink in and also on the telephone. Future aspirants, trust me on this, while all B-schools are good - an IIM Indores an IIM. No two things about that. You need to experience it to feel it and savour it.

People all suddenly start looking up to you and it won't matter whether you iron your clothes or shave your beard anymore.

### **A few pointers to all the aspirants out there**

It isn't over till it's over. Give CAT your best shot. Forget about any previous failures (I should know - from 63 percentile to 99.24

percentile). Don't bother about what others tell you. Don't think your profile is any worse than others'. Maintain a separate notebook for CAT and GDPI prep to jot down new things you learn so that all you need to refer is this one book.

Attend the IMS Achievers' Workshop. Don't get depressed if you're unable to work-study - do how much ever you can - and know that everyone faces the same time constraints. Don't worry about getting VA wrong in any of the mock tests. Study VA from the GMAT OG guide if possible.

Be positive and be yourself. You need to believe that you can make it. Always remember, **NOBODY** can be good at everything. Find out what you're good at and project that and forget about what you aren't good at.

Thanks to PaGaLGuY and puy for the amazing help each and every time I was down and out. I couldn't have got here without you.

All the best to everyone!

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# Shreyans Shrimali

## Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad

### Class of 2012

NEW

**Scored 99.99 percentile in CAT 2009.**



A moment comes in everyone's life when he/she adorns the victorious throne meant for chosen few. It need not be an IIM seat or Forbes list of the Richest. It starts with winning that first spoon race in class II, singing a song in front of a large gathering without letting the knees tremble, boldly facing the phenomenon of being a laughing stock just because you don't listen to Iron

Maiden or Enrique and finally not accepting the fact that you can't solve that quantum problem. All are rubbish. I have experienced each one of these.

I am not here to write my life story. I will concentrate only on one word - CAT. Since the past 3 years that I have known CAT, I have always experienced but have always failed to comprehend the aura that surrounds it. When you start thinking of topping that one exam, the rush of blood inside indicates that you are made for it. If the adrenaline starts flowing inside you and your legs are restless, it points to the fact that CAT beckons you. Not all get this feeling, some lose it before they start. Some lose it half way down. Some stand against that wall. If it will not be tumbled down, it will at least be cracked.

Enough gyaan? Now have a look at this,

AIMCAT 1001 - 80.44 percentile  
AIMCAT 1004 - 86.75 percentile  
AIMCAT 1005 - 99.78 percentile  
AIMCAT 1006 - 98.75 percentile  
AIMCAT 1008 - 94.14 percentile  
AIMCAT 1011 - 90.48 percentile  
AIMCAT 1012 - 89.01 percentile  
AIMCAT 1015 - 94.58 percentile  
AIMCAT 1016 - 93.54 percentile  
AIMCAT 1017 - 91.80 percentile

Each failure in mock made me wake up half an hour early and study. Visits to DT scorecards made my heart burn. Each <95 percentile made me realize that I will lose it all by a whisker and I could win it all again by a whisker. I realized that I need that ONE success which will bring out the best in me to everybody. Life consistently demands proof of excellence, till you keep adducing it, you are the king. Light up the fire inside you, to prove yourself and the world that you ARE the person you think you are.

**CAT 2009:** 99.99 percentile with 99+ in all sections.

So did Prometric do it for me? I don't know. I only know that I did it for myself. My job involved travelling almost every day. I have never stayed in Chennai which is supposedly my base location. Even right now, with 10 days to go in Britannia, I am sitting in a hotel room in Patna and writing this. My CAT slot was on Dec 6 and I was in Rudrapur (Google it if you don't know where that is) the whole November. I woke up at 4 am in the morning and studied till 8 am before heading to factory. On 24th March was IIM Calcutta interview in Bangalore and I was in Ghaziabad on 23rd afternoon in the factory. IIM Ahmedabad on 5th April - I was in Pathankot on 1st, Jammu on 2nd, Kanpur on 3rd and finally in Bangalore on 4th

April, 12 midnight. I left Bangalore for Kanpur only to be back within 2 days: IIM Lucknow on 10th April.

What keeps one going - seeing everybody around talking about Byju sir's classes and bootcamps while you are struggling with an Anemometer in 45 degree heat near the oven with an IIM interview the next day? Determination.

I was advised by one and all, to get myself a medical certificate, go on leave and prepare fulltime and make notes, study current affairs and attend mock GDs. Given the person that I am, running away from one job to finish other is the last thing I will think about. I faced it head on. Each interview attended without preparation, but surely with confidence. Because I had faith in the person that is inside me.

So the last two questions from me to you,

1. Do you think you are better than what you are being treated like?
2. Do you believe that life is short and that you are delaying the success that you deserve?

If any of the answers is a YES, get up, open the Official Quant Thread for 2010 and start!

The world ain't all sunshine and rainbows. It's a very mean and nasty place and howmuchsoever tough you are, it will beat you to your knees and keep you there permanently if you let it. You, me, or nobody is gonna hit as hard as life. But it ain't about how hard ya hit. It's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward. How much you can take and keep moving forward. That's how winning is done!

Hope I could enkindle the much needed fire inside.

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# Srikanth Sharma

## XLRI School of Business and Human Resources, Jamshedpur Class of 2009-11

NEW

**Scored 99.08 percentile in XAT 2009**



### **School days**

I started off my career with an okay 82.60% in my X standard. I never scored above 80 in my entire school and in the last 15 days leading to the board exams, I studied a bit and managed this percentage somehow.

I was a very shy boy throughout and one of my maths teachers always had the opinion that 'I was a very dull boy.' But, he was the one who taught me maths early in my life. My father once asked one of my teachers at school how I was doing. Her reply was, "He will do better as he grows up." I thought that she said it just like that to make my father happy. And today when I look back, I realise the meaning of it. There were numerous occasions when I was scolded by my teachers for not studying and tarnishing my sister's reputation who happened to be a topper at the school.

### **Intermediate days**

This was the time when my family moved to Bhubaneswar from Khurda Road, a small town where I grew up. So, now I was in a city

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for the first time in my life and I was sort of puzzled how I would adjust there in the crowd. I got admission in a good college (BJB) where there were many toppers. I studied normally. Those 2 years, I always dreamt of buying a Mitsubishi Lancer which I saw everyday.

During the 2 years, I worked hard for only 4 months and as expected didn't do well in one of the exams. Got a decent 86.00% in the board exams. But apart from that I got nothing. Never thought of an IIT as something I could achieve, but I was hopeful of an NIT. But that too I flunked badly. How could I have gotten in without studying? I had made up my mind that I would prepare for another year and do well. But, as destiny would have it, I got a 2,461 rank in the state joint entrance exam and got myself admitted in Civil engineering in CET, Bhubaneswar, which was a decent college.

### **College days**

I joined the civil branch finally but wanted to change my branch. So, studied a bit seriously before the exams and at the end of first year changed my branch to electrical. But I was happy and I thought, "Sahi hai ab, life ban gayi meri. College main placement toh ho jayega koi software company main and I'll earn 20k per month, big money." (My life is made. I'll get a job in an IT company during the college placements and earn Rs 20,000 per month, which is big money.)

Cool. In my first year, I took part in an extempore competition in my college festival. I got 'ambience' as my topic. I wanted to speak, but didn't know the meaning of the word.

But, then something happened, which changed my life forever. I fell in love with a girl at the very first instant I saw her. The truth is that I started my MBA preparation to only impress her. I started reading The Hindu newspaper religiously and found out the meaning of every new word I got. I started Norman Lewis for Vocabulary. For

the first time in my life, I was sincere about something. I vowed to do one exercise of Norman Lewis everyday. I completed 43 exercises in 35 days.

Meanwhile, my level of frustration increased as I increasingly realised that I will never succeed in my pursuit of the girl and she will never say yes to someone like me who had nothing.

Colleges festivals were going on and I saw my friends win in many events and here I was, participating in every event and getting nothing but disappointment. I felt that I was an absolute loser. The Hindu was what kept me going at that stage.

In my 3rd year, I joined Career Launcher with no real aim but just to carry forward my relentless pursuit which got more agonising everyday. Also, I joined a computer course just to keep myself occupied. I was least interested with what was taught there. I was now reading regularly and solving the Career Launcher material. I was getting more serious everyday and studying really hard; it was the only way to vent the helplessness caused by the girl I was after. She rarely spoke to me.

But, again as destiny would have it, after 1.5 years, I got committed one fine day and my dream came true. She said yes to me.

I was very happy that day. But, very soon I realised that now I had to get into a good b-school in order to convince her parents that I was worth it. Now, my parents came to know about this and I was bamboozed like anything for this. It was getting difficult for me to concentrate on my preparation because my relationship was getting very emotional, not to mention the flak I was receiving for it on a regular basis. I knew that for personal reasons this would be my first and also the last attempt at MBA exams. A do or die situation. But, she always stood by my side and encouraged me. Now, I grew only

stronger everyday and was determined to do well. My parents sacrificed a lot to make sure that I got a good education.

My coaching was going on in an okay manner, with me getting the occasional bamboo at home. I studied hard and real hard, cried many a times for making my parents and her unhappy at times. I worked like a donkey.

Then came the mocks and I started with an 83 percentile with only one section cleared. I kept on working. Some mocks were good but most of them were bad for me. I knew all along that I could do better. I learned a lot from mocks. These exams teach you a lot about life. I learnt to be patient and realised that there is no place for personal ego here. I learnt from my mistakes. I even lied to her about my mock scores just to make her happy. Then in one mock I got 43 percentile with a -13 score in the English section. There were 13 attempts, all 13 wrong. My confidence took a serious blow. After all those endless hours of practice, I had got this. I thought that I could never do well in entrance tests, that I was not made for big things. But I went on to work hard, and she always was there for me.

## **The D-day**

After 1 and a half years of endless mocks and practice, I was all geared up for the big moment. My last mocks were good, not IIM Calcuttaalibre though. I was fairly hopeful of my chances. I struggled to sleep the night before as I remembered all the things I had done in the last 2 years for this very day. I slept at 2.00 am, woke up at 7.00 am. Went to my centre too early, carried a chocolate as someone suggested as it would keep me cool and an iPod that will keep me cooler.

My nerves got the better of me and I flunked CAT.

It was over before I knew what was happening. I was dejected like hell. My friends who prepared with me did well as expected and were expecting IIM Calls.

Then, I somehow managed to get out of it and geared up for IIFT the following week. Did fairly well and was expecting a call. Results came soon on December 12, and I missed the cut-off by 1 mark.

Then JMET came and I was determined to do well this time and went in with a very cool head (no more chocolates and iPods this time). Had a very good paper and it was the best of my life. I could never have done better. Expected a SJMSOM call and a rank in the top 150. Was very happy that day. Then came SNAP, did well there also. Was expecting a SIBM, Pune call.

January 3: The day before XAT, the JMET results were online. I got a 437 rank and could not believe my eyes. Just couldn't believe that my best performance ever gave me this. This was the lowest point of my life. Next day was the XAT and I was in no mood to appear for the exam because I felt that I could get nothing in life even after giving away everything for it. On XAT day, I went in thinking nothing this time and did fairly well. Came out, no hopes this time around.

January 9: SNAP results were declared and I missed SIBM by 0.5 marks. I was just speechless at my luck.

January 10: The day before FMS, the CAT results declared. I got 96.74, no calls obviously. Many of my friends got BLACKI. I felt very low. All this time I was thinking just one thing, "Where has all my hard work gone?"

On FMS day, I gave it my best with a cool head and returned home. All the way along, she (my girlfriend) was with me. My mother encouraged me that I will get something good at the end of it all.

Also, there were people who said that there was no use of crying because of bad results and I should have worked harder in the preparation time.

January 19: XAT results were declared and to my utter disbelief, I got an XLRI BM call. I cried for 20 minutes and couldn't sleep that night. Then came FMS, got both the calls (MBA and MBA-MS) from it. I was happier. Now I had something to cheer about. Then came GD-PI stage, I worked normally this time. All interviews were over and then came the results.

## **Verdict**

First came FMS. Waitlisted at 49 for MBA and rejected for MBA-MS. Knew that FMS was over for me. Actually had an excellent PI there. My XLRI interview was also very good. But after FMS, I was doubtful now. XLRI results came on March 25 and I was waitlisted at 53 for BM. I knew that I had a fair chance.

Finally, after all the effort that I had put in for the last two years, the agony, the mental pain and of course some lovely moments also, on April 27, I got a mail that said that I was through XLRI BM. I felt a big relief, as I had tasted success for the first time in my life. I was happy. Felt vindicated. I had proved myself finally.

I would like to thank my parents for everything that they have done for me, thank my girlfriend for being with me all along and showing the faith when I had lost it all. I thank my friends Avinash and Gogi for helping me out of very emotional situations. You are really special to me. Arnav and Jami for preparing with me and showing me what this world of MBA means. A special thanks to PaGaLGuY.

Believe in yourself and nothing is impossible. It's never over.

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# Rohit Gupta

NEW

## Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad Class of 2012

**Scored 99.85 percentile in CAT 2009.**



This post is going to be really long, but I am entitled to that, because I am putting three years of my life down in a single post. So, please indulge me.

Cracking the CAT had been a long standing dream for me. This is the story of how I finally did it.

### **CAT 2007**

I was in the final year of college, with a job in my hand and no care in the world. Spent my days playing Quake, boozing and just general timepass. Though I had known from the first year that I wanted to crack the CAT, I didn't realize what it meant to me. Joined PaGaLGuY in March 2007 but hardly ever came to it or realized its value. Didn't hit the books regularly. One big coaching institute held classes in our college, and following the herd, I joined. But it became more of a nuisance rather than a boon, for what engineer with a job in hand wants to wake up at 9 am on a Sunday morning for a coaching class? Needless to say, I treated the classes no differently from my college classes, meaning I just went 'cause I had paid the

Prepared exclusively for Anupam Shrivastava

money. As soon as I came back from the classes, all was lost and my world was Quakemania again. The mocks started and I got 93 percentile in the first one. That rang a bell somewhere. If I could get 93 percentile playing Quake and studying nothing, then I stood a chance. Unfortunately, the bell that this realization rang was not loud enough, and I continued in my slumber. With one month remaining to CAT, I finally realized how important CAT was to me. Slogged for a month with the Quant and DI books by Arun Sharma, but in hindsight, I now realize that CAT 2007 was practically a lost cause. Appeared for the exam and got the following,

Quant – 97.xx

VA – 96.xx

DI – 60.xx

Overall – 95.40

## **CAT 2008**

Decided to be more serious about it this time. College finished in May, and I spent the whole of May and June doing a really simple Quant book, all the while thinking that I was practicing some worthwhile Quant. The joining date from my company came soon, and I came to Bangalore in July. Joined AIMCATs the day I stepped into Bangalore.

There are some things you can do, and some things you just cannot. No matter what the reward, there are some things you just will not or cannot do. For me, coding is one such thing. I could do Quant for hours. I could read RCs for hours. But finding my way through tonnes and tonnes of labyrinthine code was something impossible for me to accomplish. Luckily, there weren't too many restrictions on what you could browse in office. Since I couldn't take books to office, I switched to PaGaLGuY I read for hours on end, while my teammate did most of the work. He enjoyed that, and I enjoyed this freedom from office work. Came across the scores of the Bangalore

Dream Team, and gaped . Being an introvert, I generally prefer to keep to myself and make the least social contact possible. Still, I persuaded myself to go to a PG meet. I was already in awe of the\_hate, and I probably went just to meet him. Met a lot of other guys too, like Prem bhai (prem\_ravi), rsriram84, shabadp, yogconnect, amrutesh666\* and some more. Listened to some gyaan from hate. By the end of the meet, rsriram84 and I were pals. He was probably my first friend from PG, and we are pals to this day.

I continued to do the least possible work in office. God gifted me an awesome manager. I will not name him here but he was probably the best thing that ever happened to me. Read on, and you'll soon know why. Mocks started off with a 98 percentile, but slowly slipped to early 90s. I kept missing cutoffs, mostly in DI and hardly ever in VA. QA showed up a couple of times, but that wasn't an issue.

I have one big problem. Before any big exam, I cannot sleep! No matter how much I try, I cannot. I had taken a week off from office right before CAT, and thought I would alter my sleeping patterns to adjust my waking time to that of C-Day. Unfortunately, I failed to stick to that schedule, and ended up getting just 4 hours of sleep before CAT! Needless to say, my brain felt like a ball of gum. I looked at the questions and just sat there. Nothing clicked. I was so wasted that day, even VA ditched me. Before the result, I spent my days begging God to just give me any percentile above 90, and promising myself that I would definitely crack CAT the next time. I ended up with the following percentiles,

Quant – 89.xx

VA – 88.xx

DI – 90.xx

Overall – 94.18

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\* All these are usernames of members of the PaGaLGuY community.



Now came the humiliating task of telling everyone what I had scored. I did that, for what option did I have? All around me, people were getting calls, enrolling for GDs and interviews, and I was wishing that the Earth opened up and I fell in through the cracks. The prep I did in office made sure everyone knew I was a CAT aspirant, and everyone wanted to know how I had fared. Failure is a bitter pill to swallow, and for me, it's somewhat of an anathema. I absolutely hate to fail. I am my own worst critic, and harsher than the Army when it comes to judgment. The IIM fire still burnt. I promised myself that I won't be denied a third time. I would kill or be killed for an IIM this time.

## **CAT 2009**

This was it. If I failed at this, I would be lost. The prospect of year upon year in my current job haunted me, and stoked the IIM fire to a point where it became a madness. I was ready to give anything for CAT, anything at all. The music in my phone was replaced with audio wordlists. I listened to words while travelling to office, eating breakfast, basically at any time I could. Always carried a set of T.I.M.E. flash cards in my bag, reading them whenever I could. I was already good at VA and didn't need the wordlists, but I still felt that a lot of my time could be spent more constructively for CAT prep purposes. Sleep took a backseat, and I made up a crazy schedule for myself. It was crazy, but it worked. I slept from 6 to 9 in the evening. Had my dinner at 9 pm and sat down to work around 10 pm, and slogged till 3 am or 4 am in the morning. Slept at 4 am, got up at 8 am and was in office by 9 am, bleary-eyed, unshaven and often late. I eat really really fast, so the daily newspaper readings were done in lunch time. Some days, I was so exhausted I fell asleep in the library or was forced to sleep in a resting room my office had. Joined a famous teacher in Bangalore, and was amazed with the quality of stuff there. If I couldn't do it with all this stuff, I wasn't worthy of an IIM. There were weeks when I had to go to office on weekends, and this meant I was running all the time, 6 days of office and 1 day of

coaching. No rest. No letups anywhere. It was killing, but I was ready to do whatever it took.

The mocks began. The first one, AIMCAT 1020, was not for test series people, but I aced 1019, getting a 99.56 with all sectionals enough to qualify for an IIM Ahmedabad call. Me and some coaching friends had a small celebration of that success. I prayed that this continued, and barring minor hiccups, it did. Got in touch with Doc at this time ('shashank3012' for the uninitiated) and took an instant liking to him. He was someone who could, and was happy to, talk about CAT, mocks, scores, strategies, percentiles and all such stuff for hours. Also, he is an optimist, and someone who believes in me much more than I do in myself. The PG Dream Team nominations began, and he even nominated me Captain of his team. This was an unexpected show of confidence, and I again resolved I would not fail. Then came the day I was selected for the Dream Team. A year ago, I had watched from the sidelines as the Bangalore Dream Team guys took apart the AIMCATs, and I had lived to see myself chosen to the most coveted Team on the whole of PG. That was the first time I began to believe I was good, and good enough to stand among the best. The madness was finally beginning to pay off.

My manager saw how hard I studied, and respected that. You won't find many guys appreciate that kind of thing. So, I wasn't overloaded with work and was able to give time to my studies. The mocks continued in a crazy rollercoaster graph. I defined a 'miss' as *not* qualifying for an IIM Ahmedabad call. I always believed that the intense pressure on C-Day would bring down my performance, and so the aim was to be so good that even on an average day, I would outperform a whole lot of people. As it turns out, I crossed IIM Ahmedabad cutoffs only thrice in the mocks, but that was okay. And anyway, there was nothing I could do about it except keep improving, mock to mock.

Finally, CAT began. And with it began the stories of a disaster that was to be discussed, remembered and torn apart for a long time to come. Everywhere you saw, every time you refreshed PaGaLGuY homepage, there were new horror stories to be seen. Crashes, reboots, missing diagrams, missing timers, repeated questions, the entire gamut was in attendance. Someone advised that I should choose a slot in the middle of the testing period, as the end slots might be difficult as more people came to know of questions from earlier slots. I chose December 4, 2009, and started looking through previous CAT papers at a fiendish rate.

The day came. As usual, I was on a 10-day leave from office. I awoke, had a couple of biscuits and tea, and set off. Reached the centre and got in. Then began the long wait for the exam to begin. Finally, I was allotted a system. Being a believer in numerology, I had hoped I would get a machine number somehow linked to 7. I glanced at what the examiner had written on my admit card. S-1. Okay, I could still do it. When you are that nervous, the least little thing going askew can mess you up. Went to my seat. The exam began. As usual, I began with VA. I had to do all, no matter what, 'cause VA was my lifeline. That was where I got the most marks. I did 14 questions and reached the last 2 RCs. To my horror, they were inferential. And not just any inferential, the you-won't-get-any-of-it kind of inferential. Used every last bit of brain I had to do those two. Did all 20 in VA and got out. Moved to DI, did a comfortable 15 and got out. Moved to QA and started doing. After some time, I glanced at the timer. 15 minutes to go. Number of questions completed – 8. Shit. And then, I started working faster than I had done in a long, long time. At the end of the 15 minutes, I had done around 17 questions, though I didn't count, 'cause I was using every last second to the maximum. Total attempts: 52.

XAT came and went. It was okay, except that I realized early on that DI was undoable in that particular paper. Took a chance in QA, by doing only 12 questions, out of a total of 40. When you do that few

questions, you had better be damn sure they are almost all correct. Total attempts in XAT – 54. Called up shashan3012, and almost died when I heard he had done 71!! Then the reports started coming in, and it was not I who had attempted less but doc who had attempted more! 54 was an above average number of attempts, and a reasonable accuracy rate would see me through.

FMS too came and went. Attempted 111. But found that 3 RCs had been repeated, and people had completed those in 10-12 minutes flat! FMS appeared to be a lost cause. But then, what could I do?

Results started coming in after what seemed like a long long time. XAT came in first: 99.01 percentile, all sectionals secured, BM call. Nice. FMS came in. Ding. Heartbreaking, but expected somewhere in the core of my heart. Still no sign of CAT results.

My XLRI interview was scheduled for Feb 28, 5:40 pm. Around 1 pm, I was reading on my laptop when a tweet popped up from PaGaLGuY – ‘CAT results out!’ It was the moment of truth. If I had crashed, I would be so depressed that I would be in no state to take up the XLRI interview. I had about 2 minutes to check my result before the servers crashed. I chose to see it. Twice I typed the wrong registration number, ‘cause I was trembling. Finally, Ctrl-C + Ctrl-V came to my rescue, and the results opened. The first figure I saw was 98.58. Shit. Another year down the drain. But then I saw it was only the Quant percentile! I glanced at the overall. 99.85. Glanced at DI. 97.96. This looked unbelievable, and I knew VA would not desert me. 99.65. Wow! I was through! Ahmedabad declared its result along with the CAT result. A quick Ctrl-F + Ctrl-V found my roll number in the list, and my face lit up like the Sun. Shillong was never going to call me but I checked anyway. Ding. No problem. I didn’t really care anyway. Called home to tell them the result, and then called shahank3012. To say that I was sad for him, would be an understatement. But I was short of time, so I dressed and left for Delhi. XLRI went like a breeze. Took a cab and came back to Gurgaon.

All the interviews went fine. Was greatly helped by shashank3012. Any amount of thanks I give to 'NeverG!veup' will be insufficient. She helped me clear up a huge number of interview concepts, and our discussions on interview preparations are sweet memories to cherish. Lady, I wish you the best in life, and may you get all you wish for!

Had some jitters only for IIM Calcutta, since it was the first one. Ahmedabad was great and I missed only 3 questions in the whole of 25 minutes. Lucknow was a bit odd, with some random discussions in the midst. MDI was bizarre, but I did not want to convert it anyway, so I mentioned in there that I had calls from Ahmedabad, Calcutta and Lucknow and had rocked the interviews, and will convert all!

**Calls for the 2009 season:** IIMs A C L, XLRI-BM, MDI

**Converts:** IIMs A C L, MDI, XLRI-BM waitlist at 11, which I converted later.

Will be joining IIM Ahmedabad. Totally a personal decision. All IIMs are God-level institutes. But, I wouldn't be able to live without WIMWI. For me, to give up WIMWI when I have the chance, is unthinkable.

### **Random Gyaan**

I think too many people don't give CAT the respect it deserves. The exam might have gotten easier, but then, its easy for each of the 2 lakh aspirants. An easy exam is harder to crack, because a single silly mistake can make or break the day, and hence there is no margin for error. I have always revered CAT as the holiest of exams, for WIMWI is, to me, the holiest of institutions. Respect the exam and don't take it lightly. Hard work won't be unrewarded forever. Use every minute of your time constructively if possible, for its better to

do that than to think, someday, that you could have done better, prepared better, studied harder. Kill yourself for a year, and you'll be a God the rest of your life. Don't waste weekends, for that is the most precious time for a working CAT aspirant. Do justice to CAT, and God will do justice to you.

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# Amarendra Gorai

## Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode Class of 2010-12

NEW

**Scored 98.14 percentile in CAT 2009**



Probably, at first glance, my CAT journey might seem to be a one defined by luck – having converted an IIM Call the very first time I did any serious preparation! But, by the time readers finish reading my experience, opinions might change.

### **Final Year of Graduation: 2008**

The first time I ever took CAT was in 2007 during the final year of my engineering at KIIT, Bhubaneswar on my parents' behest. I never prepared for it and just wanted to see where I stood amongst the thousands of bright minds of India. In fact, I was one of those technical and adventurous guys who used to do a lot of projects in robotics, roam around with friends, participate in technical (and cultural) fests at IITs around the country and win quite a few of them. Google and Microsoft were my dream companies. Alas, none of them came for recruitment to our college that year. Yes, Indian Air Force did come and I cleared all its psychological and medical fitness rounds. I also had an offer from Tata Consultancy Services.

## **The Way Destined**

As expected, CAT 2008 was a disaster – to the extent that I managed a meagre 70 percentile overall. I wasn't perturbed for I had made up my mind to join the IAF. But, destiny had other plans. TCS joining date came within days of me finishing my graduation. There was no surety of the final call from IAF (I was yet to receive the final joining letter). Consequently, I became a part of the workforce that India has no dearth of at all – software professionals! (IAF did call after a few weeks, but by then I was already into a bond with TCS).

I joined TCS R&D thereafter and began my technical career. I was being paid reasonably well, had a bike and roamed around the lively streets of Delhi. But at the end of the day, I always felt about doing something bigger and better! Being into R&D, I was often inspired by my colleagues preparing for GRE and planning for an MS degree abroad. I reckoned that it was high time I thought seriously about what my aspirations were. It was then (around May 2009) that I zeroed upon CAT again. This time, seriously!

## **The CAT Chase**

I joined Career Launcher classroom coaching in July 2009. Classes were interesting and devoting around an hour or two everyday at home wasn't a tough call at all. I hardly missed classes at Career Launcher (was always very concerned about the Return On my Investment) and ensured that I grasped the concepts well. Mock Tests started soon. Contrary to my expectations, in my first mock test, I could only fetch 75 percentile! Anyways, I reckoned that I still had sufficient amount of time and went ahead. I took a number of mock tests with different strategies. With more focus on selective topics (like Number System, Algebra and Geometry in QA), I tried to maximize my score. On a number of occasions, I missed out on lollypop (simple) questions towards the end of the paper as I would have no time left. Somewhere, I read that going through the



questions initially and selecting the ones to attempt is actually an investment of time, and not a waste. This struck me well and I followed the same judiciously. Finally, I had a complete strategy.

Even with all this, the highest I could ever fetch in a Career Launcher mock exam was 91 percentile. Some tutors even advised me to maximise my score in one subject rather than trying to balance the three (it was hardly a month left for CAT 2009). Based on my past percentiles, Career Launcher b-school predictor had started showing B-grade colleges to me! I used to get disappointed at times, but with the past experiences of test takers in mind, I knew that I could make it! It was only a matter of correctly attempting a few more questions and my percentile would shoot! My parents and a few friends played a pivotal role with the motivation and confidence that they instilled in me.

The last one month to CAT 2009, I attempted mock tests very sincerely. Analysing every question after the test, grasping concepts, rectifying silly mistakes and refining my strategy! Finally on the D-day (December 1, 2009), everything went perfect! Selecting questions, finishing them off within the stipulated time and attempting more than the number I had planned – all went well. In short, I was confident that this was the best I could give.

## **Results**

The results came and I managed 98.14 percentile with 97.32, 96.22 and 89.7 in QA, DI and VA respectively! I was shattered. If only I had managed two more questions in VA! No call from IIM Ahmedabad or Shillong the first day. Nor from Calcutta or Lucknow the subsequent days. With more than 90% in X and XII, I had a distant hope only on Bangalore (Kozhikode and Indore were known to give more weightage to CAT). After a few days, IIM Kozhikode announced its shortlist at around 10 pm. Uninterested, I checked the same around 1 am. And Wonder of Wonders! I had a call!! I thanked

God and was so excited that I called up my home that very moment! Finally, I had one IIM Call! In fact, the only one (IIM Bangalore had ditched me too).

## **Another Round Of Preparation**

I realised that I had to convert the one call I had, or else lay the trauma of preparation for one more year! I judiciously started attending Career Launcher PDP classes. I felt that I was the only regular student who was continuing at Career Launcher since months! No other face seemed familiar – all were new ones! Nevertheless, I attended the Career Launcher bootcamp. The mock interview and GD were disasters! In no way, I could afford this. I went home, deeply analysed my faults and refined the way I had to present myself (read my achievements, strengths, weaknesses, focus on job and Tata Group, etc). I made a checklist and studied extensively on IIM Kozhikode, the Tata Group, economic affairs, current affairs, and so on. Though we were allowed to participate in only one bootcamp, I deliberately managed to participate again! This time, I got great feedback (with minor suggestions). My subsequent mock interviews went great – to such an extent that in my last interview the panelist said, “We would be surprised if you are not selected”. This was a great booster for me!

In a nutshell, I would like future CAT aspirants to always keep in mind the following,

1. Never ever get demotivated by low percentiles or by anyone's comments! Believe in yourself that you can do it. In fact, numerous people HAVE DONE IT!
2. Mock Tests are immensely important for CAT. Practise them wholeheartedly with deep analysis of each of them. They would help you build the perfect strategy for CAT.

3. There's a famous song in Bengali which goes, “Walk alone if no one follows on hearing your call.” There would be many obstructions in your CAT journey, never succumb to them! Only your dreams and determination can take you through! Dream big and stay motivated!

4. Nothing that you ever did in your life goes waste. It would come back to help you sometime in your future (that includes X marks, XII marks, playing tabla six years ago, not missing my school for six consecutive years, robotics in college, etc in my case).

**ALL THE BEST TO FUTURE CAT ASPIRANTS!** Hope this post helped.

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# Anuj Mahajan

## Management Development Institute, Gurgaon PGPIM Class of 2010-12

NEW

**Scored 98.14 percentile in CAT 2009**



I read this thread once during my 1st attempt of CAT. At that time somewhere deep down, I knew I will also post my experience here. When? Where? How? That was the part that needed to be decided.

Well, at the outset, I will warn that this is not the story which ends in one of those hallowed portals of BLACKI. Although everyone aspires to be there, the reality is that aspirations can help you only that much. What really matters is individual capability. I was never one of those people who used to come 1st in class or top subjects in college, I was just a smartass who knew his numbers and pretty much sucked elsewhere. What I didn't lack was confidence and common sense which has always helped me in life.

### **CAT 2006**

I started my CAT prep by joining IMS Noida in March 2006. Like every other aspirant, I had a starry-eyed view of MBA. Big money, super campuses, lots of fun, you get to smell real business and

whatnot. And CAT, they used to say was a simple exam of Maths, English and calculations. All three I was confident in. During the coaching classes, I was doing well and reached answers quickly. My centre head was pretty confident of me doing well and I had already started dreaming of GDPI. Even in mocks, I scored 95 percentile which I was sure will improve to greater than 98/99 till the C-day. There were topics like geometry and Permutations and Combinations which were a pain in the neck but I decided not to pay much attention to them as I was not going to attempt them anyways. A line by my center head stuck in my mind – ‘Jis galli me jaana nahi uska pata pooch ke kya fayda?’ (Why inquire about the whereabouts of streets you do not wish to enter?)

English was fine and DI was okayish, but inconsistent. In Quant I had pre-decided that since cut-offs were anyway low, I would do only those questions from topics that are comfortable to me and leave the rest. It was working well for me in mocks as IMS mocks used to be tough in quant and DI and I could clear the cut-offs and maximize in English.

So the day arrived and I gave the CAT. I was under pressure as I had expectations, I knew this was one thing I could do well. For the first time in my life I had the opportunity to prove that I was good in something. This was certainly an ego trip for me.

But after the exam I was shattered. I just knew I hadn't done well. To start off, there was a question in Quant that was incorrect and I wasted 10 minutes on that. Plus somehow I lost track of time at the start. VA was super tough and with that went out my hopes of maximising. Till the time I came to DI, I had lost all orientation of common sense. I came back, slept and then checked my attempts.

It was game over. People had banged quant and I had only selectively done it! My friends told me it wasn't over till the results came but deep down I knew it was. Results came and it was a

hopeless 80 percentile. The 95 percentile in VA being my only solace. My friend checked that for me and he didn't tell me till I started calling him incessantly because he knew I would be disappointed. That day I was with my family in Ahmedabad. My dad used to work there. We went out for a nice dinner and he took me to an ice cream parlour near IIM Ahmedabad. That day I realised what CAT meant to me personally. That was a disturbing pain I cannot forget. You know you can do well but somehow you cannot.

After that I forgot about CAT, literally. I was so shocked; I started avoiding discussions on it. My future was somehow secured as I was placed in Infosys and TCS. I didn't take CAT the next year and started working. But deep down, I knew I had to conquer it.

In 2008 I started preparing again. One good thing that happened was that I never took my work lightly. I worked hard and took full interest and was doing well in my appraisals. This changed my outlook a bit and I attained some maturity. But I wasn't serious on CAT. Only gave mocks in which again I was scoring well. But I was not studying and this thing again hurt me. Only 85 percentile. But that was okay. I had already decided I had to work for 2-3 years and then do an MBA as that was my so-called ideal plan. This meant that 2009 attempt was going to be crucial.

In 2009, CAT turned computer-based and a surprise was in store. The format was new and needed a different kind of prep. Again I joined a test-series, Career Launcher this time as I was fed up with IMS. This time my initial mocks weren't so great, so I was forced to study sporadically. Some consistency started creeping in but again nothing concrete. One thing good about Career Launcher mocks was the analysis they provided online. I used to sit up late at nights in front of my computer and keep on analyzing my mocks. By the end of October I was pretty much sure how I was going to attempt the paper. Quant followed by DI and VA; the idea was as simple as Kapil Dev's about batting, 'There is a ball and it's meant to be hit'. Mine was

that there is a question and it's meant to be solved. So I focused a lot on speed.

The D-day came and I attempted 45-46 questions with no clue about accuracy or anything. But as it turned out, everyone worth his/her salt attempted 50 and more. Again I thought that another year would go down the drain. But this time I had applied to a lot of other b-schools and entrance tests such as SNAP, IIFT, NMAT etc.

IIFT I missed by 2 marks and for SIBM I missed VA by a cruel 0.25. I was disappointed to say the least. I thought it was all over. I got a call from SCMHRD, Pune and off I was to my 1st ever GDPI. I thought I did well there, but I eventually couldn't convert that. Took NMAT as the last hope but wasn't really sure about it, as it was computer-based too.

But surprisingly, the CAT results came and I had scored 98.14 percentile with the least percentile in DI at 87. I was over the moon as finally I had finally done what I felt I should have a long time ago.

As the initial euphoria subsided, I found that I had calls from MDI, IMT and IMI which I knew I had to convert. NMAT results came and I had again scored 98 percentile. I was happy as I knew that at last I would do an MBA this year surely. Moreover, the happiness was that I was able to prove to myself that I could do well in these 'simple exams of maths and English'.

I prepared well for the GDPI and they went well too as I had good quality of work experience to cover my average academics. Final results came and I got through MDI Gurgaon, NM's MBA Core along with IMI in the first list itself. IMT Ghaziabad IB was converted too though I was not really interested. NM was particularly sweet as I secured an overall 83 rank, compared to my initial 700 rank after the written test. MDI Gurgaon was a dream come true. I had worked in

Gurgaon and had many times passed by the college with a distant desire that one day I would come here.

I think I did well because I knew deep down that I had to do it. Also, I had a very good support system. My family never pressurised me for anything, so that was good in a way. Passion is undoubtedly the ultimate key to success, is what my father once casually told me during my prep and these lines somehow stuck. Whether you aim for any b-school, if you believe you can do it, there is no stopping you. Many a times during the last 4 years, I have been told that I should quit. But for me there was no other way. I simply had to do an MBA from a top-20 b-school no matter what happened. I never thought about GMAT because I wanted to conquer my fear of CAT and not die in the hope that I could do well in it.

But one thing I have realised is that one should not make one thing the whole and soul of their existence. I learned it during my work which I enjoyed probably because it was different from what everyone else around me was doing. That made me relax during my prep time to an extent that I didn't take single day's leave for either CAT or GDPI from office and still found a way to prepare for both. Having a passion is a good thing but enjoying your work, life and having an occasional good time with friends and loved ones is equally important, because that gives us happiness which no amount of money can buy. And isn't happiness the butterfly which we are all trying to catch?

Lastly, no words can truly describe what PaGaLGuy means to true believers of CAT and MBA in general. Thanks PaGaLGuy.

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)



# Varun Ramamurthy

## Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta

### Class of 2010-12

NEW

**Scored 99.97 percentile in CAT 2009**

It all started when T.I.M.E.. conducted its scholarship test back in 2006 and I was able to get a 75% discount on the course fee. I attended all the classes religiously; even those that people generally call 'must not attend' classes. And by the time the first AIMCAT arrived I was ready enough to get a 3rd city rank and a 99 percentile in my first ever mock CAT.

It was deja vu again! It seemed exactly the same way when I started out with my IIT preparations (I was amongst the toppers in my class in my first ever Math IIT test.)

A small recap of the events that preceded my CAT journey first.

### **Rewind to 2002**

A sense of confidence which bordered on the 'higher' side crept in and the downfall started. I failed to clear the IIT-JEE. Got a good enough state rank in AIEEE, however my lack of information created a rather peculiar situation for me, and I ended up in one of the lower-rung NITs when people with lower ranks were ending up in the higher ones. That I left that NIT and joined a state government college is a different matter altogether.

## 2007

I decided not to let the JEE fiasco happen to me again!! Ever again.

Three things I would like to advise,

**1. Never forget your past.** The moment you do that, you will end up doing the same mistakes again and again and again.

**2. Never allow overconfidence** to creep in at any part of the journey. Overconfidence is a disease and will destroy your journey completely.

**3. Be information-hungry.** Try to know the inside out of whatever you are going to do. I was not information-hungry and I did not end up studying from the top NITs at least if not from the IITs.

My 2007 mock CATs with all its ups and downs ended on a rather high note and come February 2008, all my tests were over. My percentile scores were,

CAT 2007 - 98.79

XAT 2008 - 98.24

I did not get any b-school calls and I had not applied to any other college than the IIMs and XLRI.

I spoke to an IIM Bangalore graduate and this was what he told me, "If you are able to get a 98 percentile in both CAT and XAT it means you have something in you. Let me know how much you get in CAT 2008."

And I hit the road again. Only that this time I started with negative thoughts. I had seen seemingly well-off people with much lower

scores getting through and I started cribbing about the system. Never did I realise that there was still scope for me to improve. I was employed in a good company and CAT 2008 came and went without anything fruitful.

May 2009 and I was in familiar territory again. For a change, I had a nice set of dedicated friends in Bangalore. A few coaching sessions and I was ready and raring to go. Mock CATs started and I as usual started with a bang. However this time I was able to sustain it. With 3-4 consecutive high scores I was as match-ready as I ever was.

But life had other plans. I was shifted out of Bangalore and my initial few months in Mumbai were hectic to say the least. Throw in a few personal issues and I suddenly felt as if I was a Castaway on an island.

Sample this,

AIMCAT 1009 - 68 percentile  
AIMCAT 1004 – 60-odd percentile

Not very high in spirits, I took my first ever IIIFT test. And my score was 49.5 out of 100.

A few things to remember,

1. Try to keep CAT completely insulated from your personal life
2. The season opener - IIIFT exam is one of the most important exams. It sets the tone if it goes well...

Amidst all the drama, I took CAT 2009 on Dec 1. The paper turned out to be much worse than an AIMCAT paper and I simply couldn't believe that it was a CAT paper. And I was able to attend almost all of the questions. Contrary to the CAT, XAT was a wonderful paper, one that tested a person's ability more than any other paper.

The results came. XAT was out and I didn't make it because my LR score was low.

XAT 2010 - 98.88 percentile

But when February 28 happened, it was out of this world.

My CAT 2009 score,

QA - 99.98 percentile

DI - 98.98 percentile

VA - 98.81 percentile

Overall - 99.97 percentile

A few IIM Calls trickled in (both the IIM Calcutta calls, Lucknow and Ahmedabad). I was still not sure if I did deserve a high CAT score. I thought if I could convert atleast one call then maybe I was good enough. And I converted 4 out of the 5 calls I had got (rejected at Ahmedabad). I finally joined IIM Calcutta.

And there ends my story!

## **Postscript**

1. This post is not intended to make any hero out of me. I am not. And I can provide no instance that will make you all go 'wow'. This is just a small recount of the journey of a 'boy next door' and a few suggestions to the future CAT takers based on it.
2. If this post is able to help at least one person then it has solved its purpose.
3. If you think that the IIMs are the be all and end all of your life

then I would seriously advise you to read 'The Outliers' by Malcolm Gladwell - the part on IQ and Nobel Prize winners.

IIMs, XLRI, SP Jain, FMS, etc are all special. One doesn't become great simply because he is from an IIM.

4. Hard work still pays and please read 'Outliers' to see this fact in demonstration.

And as the saying , "The race is long and at the end it is all with you!!"

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# Purnachandra Rao Duggirala

## Indian Institute of Management, Indore Class of 2004-06

**Scored 99.56 percentile in CAT 2003**



At last, I have completed this marathon post. It is divided into several sub-sections to facilitate easy reading. Hope it helps all CAT aspirants out there.

### **CAT 2002 and the Aftermath**

During my engineering second year, I decided to take the CAT. Basically, I didn't know why I wanted to go that way. But some reasons I could think of were,

1. A very decent pay Rs 4-5 lakhs per annum
2. A comfortable life for me and my family
3. The challenge that the CAT poses
4. I was tired of my tryst with technical courses: first a diploma and then engineering

So, I started looking for information on management education in India. Soon, I figured out that I needed to crack the CAT to have any chances of entering a business school. After some more investigation, I found that, lots of reading and good math and

calculation skills are necessary for cracking the CAT. I decided to improve my verbal ability, communication skills and business knowledge to considerable levels before I started to attend CAT coaching classes.

Subscribed to a BusinessWorld 3 year subscription offer in late second year (of engineering). I also started reading Reader's Digest, India Today and other magazines. All the while I also tried to do reasonably well in my academics.

Come December 2001 and I decided to join a CAT coaching class. There was not much choice available in Vizag at that time. So I joined T.I.M.E.. for CAT 2002 coaching. I used to attend those classes daily from 6am to 8am in the morning and used to feel proud about doing something extra. In the first 4 months nothing improved. It was just classes and some sectional tests. Never ever were we tested with actual CAT papers. Then came the summer vacation. I convinced my parents about staying back in Vizag so that I could attend classes as well as take some tests. But I had absolutely no plan and no idea of the amount of work required for cracking the CAT. Nor was I sure about what colleges I wanted to apply and what it is that I was looking for during the whole ordeal. The first two months were a breeze... well, actually they were the hottest two months of my life with the summer peaking at temperatures of 45 degrees. At the end of the second month, I took my first ever mock CAT and believe me, it came as a shock. Whatever practice I had done so far seemed to be useless. The results also turned out to be bad. At once I realised the importance of solving more mock tests and practicing CAT-like questions.

Then the academic session started. Not that I studied for exams, but we had to do two projects in the final year, and the pressure was building up. I have always liked to do my work for myself. So I started taking my project seriously and by the time it was September 2002, I had lost my momentum in mock tests. My ranks in the

AIMCATs (mock CATs offered by T.I.M.E.) plummeted below 300 and settled there. But they never went beyond 500. Somehow I had a strong feeling that I could crack the actual CAT if I maintained my AIMCAT ranks below 500. Apart from CAT, I was also considering other options such as FMS, IIFT, XLRI, IRMA, NITIE and JMET. I was desperate to pursue MBA right after graduation.

Well, at last the D-day arrived and I was sitting in the CAT 2002 examination hall. As usual, I started off with the verbal ability section. But since the verbal section was the weakest link of the chain for me, I spent a considerable amount of time on that section and did almost 40 questions. By the time I was done with it, I was already 50 minutes into the test.

I quickly rushed to the quantitative ability section. And if any one of you has seen the CAT 2002 quant section, you know what I am talking about here. That section was tough. But quant was always my strength. So I put a full 40 minutes and attempted some 27 questions there.

There were only 30 minutes left now and I proceeded to the smaller DI sets. If you look at the CAT 2002 DI paper, you would know that there were 7-8 such sets with 3-5 questions each. Any given day, one could attempt 30 plus questions there and easily score above 25. But since I had managed to mismanage my time, I could only solve 19 questions in 30 minutes. But, I didn't think it was that bad, because in the T.I.M.E.. AIMCATs 19-20 questions was always a very good attempt rate. Little did I realize that T.I.M.E.. AIMCATs were very different from the original CAT.

After the exam I had a feeling that I could get at least 2-3 IIM Calls. All these were illusions and a result of my poor understanding of the CAT and lack of overall perspective. I had assumed that I could get a score above 58, which according to T.I.M.E.. was the predicted



cutoff. This was again was due to my poor analysis of the AIMCATs. I had not figured out my Accuracy and Strike rates yet.

## **The Results**

They came one after another. First IIM Bangalore, then Calcutta. Then Ahmedabad, Indore, Kozhikode and Lucknow, in that order. All of them had the same message for me - 'Sorry... '

I was devastated. I could not do anything for a couple of days. The thought that I was a loser had consumed me completely. In the mess, I even felt like I was shameless to be eating food. It was my first ever major failure in life. And with no job in hand I was down in the dumps.

By the time it was the last week of April, I had only one final admission- from the Institute of Rural Management, Anand (IRMA). I was not sure about joining it. I told my parents that I want to attempt the CAT again in 2003 and for that I wanted to stay back in Vizag. They expressed their difficulty in supporting me after engineering and suggested that I should join IRMA. I started applying to companies frantically for a job. But few seemed to be interested in hiring a fresher. I started considering working as a faculty in an engineering college. All this because, somewhere in my heart I knew that IRMA was not the place from where I wanted to do my MBA.

At last, in the first week of May 2003, I got a job offer through campus placements at my engineering college. There was decent pay and no bond. I accepted it immediately and decided to attempt CAT 2003.

## **What was wrong with my approach in cracking CAT 2002?**

1. I never worked on the study material given by the coaching institute

2. My preparation for English was very haphazard. All I did was read the newspapers, write unknown words in a book and do some silly grammar exercises. I never solved practice papers and I never paid attention to Reading Comprehension. I did not even know what my reading speed was like.

3. I never analysed my AIMCAT papers. Whatever little analysis I did was focused on the quant section. I never knew what my strengths or weaknesses were. I paid little attention to my accuracy and strike rate. My single focus was to attain a high rank in the AIMCAT.

4. I did not know the difference between a sitter question and an ordinary question. My approach had been – start from question 1 and solve till the 50th question.

5. My preparation was completely random. I never had a proper timetable. Even if I had one, it was cluttered with non-important non-urgent tasks. I thought that reading books would help me in cracking RC in CAT. But more than reading books, I needed to work on my reading methods.

6. My time management was poor and emotional. By emotional, I mean that if I felt that I was not doing a section well, I used to spend some more time on it to satisfy my ego. This led to an erratic and random score pattern. Nothing was consistent in my mocks. Not just marks, but the number of mistakes also varied.

7. Lack of overall perspective and competition.

## **CAT 2003**

### **May - August, 2003**

I took a one-week break to adjust myself to the new workplace I had joined from the campus placement. In Mid-May 2003, I took a

Diagnostic CAT test offered by one of the coaching institutes and my scores were reasonable. But I knew that I needed a systematic approach to crack the CAT. So, I planned the next 3.5 months for each day.

My work schedule kept me out of home everyday from 7 am to 7 pm. So, I had 3-4 hours in the night to study and slog. I categorized the entire CAT syllabus into four broad areas.

- Logical Reasoning (LR)
- Data Interpretation and Data Sufficiency (DI/DS)
- Quantitative Ability (QA)
- Verbal Ability (VA)

I had identified the important topics in these areas and decided to give more preference to VA.

For each topic in first three areas I had allotted one/two days and my aim was to complete that topic from either the coaching institute study material or class X textbooks.

During office hours I used to solve problems posted on CAT 2003 YahooGroups and PaGaLGuY.com.

## **Mock CATs**

The first one was in June end, the AIMCAT 401. At that time my preparation was only half done and I had so many topics to complete. But, the experience from last year helped a lot. I managed to secure an All India Rank of 60 in that test, even though my net score was just above 30. But this kind of thing happens with the first T.I.M.E.. mock CATs. After this mock, I made it a point to record my mock performances in an Excel sheet. The columns in each row of the sheet had,

Serial Number  
Date and Mock No  
Vocabulary  
Reading Comprehension  
Quant  
DI, DS and Logic  
Comments

I recorded almost all mock test scores in this sheet. I also used to write about unknown words, shortcuts, question numbers, silly mistakes I made and mistakes in my strategy in that sheet. Before taking another mock, I used to first go through that sheet. This helped me in consciously avoiding the mistakes I had committed in earlier mocks and fine-tuning my strategy.

### **Some guidelines for taking mocks**

- Stick to the time. If you are taking a two-hour test, take it for two hours only. Be merciless, especially if you are taking them in your home. Don't let anything disturb you in those two hours.
- Make it a habit of using a watch.
- Have a strategy in mind before you start the test. Take 2-3 minutes to analyse the paper and say to yourself something like, "VA is heavy – there are four RCs, quant has some diagram-based sets of questions, DI has lengthy sets and some DS questions, and there is no LR. So let me start with VA and then move to QA and then finish with DI." Once you know the order of sections, set time limits to each section and stick to them. Never let your ego surface in those two hours. This is what I used to do – I used to give time limits of 35 minutes for each section. And in the end I used to visit the toughest or easiest section and make up for a good overall score.
- Most importantly realise that you have to get most out of the test. Don't be egoistic and sit on a problem beyond 2-3 mins. If you get it

in 1 minute, it's ok. Beyond that, learn to leave problems. Try to read as many questions as possible and decide which ones you can solve quickly. This knack of identifying the 'sitter' questions comes from taking 30-40 mocks in a span of three months.

- After the paper, don't rush to the answer key. Take a break, relax for sometime and then start looking at the paper. Try to find out correct answers without looking at the key. Analyse your answers and see if there was any faster or better method to solve the questions. Try to reason out, why you did not attempt that RC or DI set and cross check whether that was really as tough as you thought. Try to estimate your score before jumping to the answer key. This will help you in learning about your accuracy. After the analysis is over, verify your answers with answer key and if needed, go through the detailed answers. My mistakes used to mostly surface in the analysis phase. Checking with the answer key was more about validating my analysis.

- Always try to share your mock score and analysis with others. This will give you a better overall picture and good understanding of your relative standing. Use PaGaLGuY.com or Yahooogroups for this purpose. Many people use these groups for only posting scores. They don't realise that these groups are not notice boards. What you should instead do is to try and analyse the paper and post that also. With that you are helping no one else but yourself.

- Always calculate accuracy and speed figures for individual sections and the overall paper. And try to maintain a stable figure of speed and accuracy. If there is an abrupt change in those figures, try to investigate why the change happened. Ideally, 60 pc speed (attempts) with 80 pc + accuracy will help you in getting good scores. But speed sometimes varies with easiness of the paper. Identifying the trends of speed and accuracy in August or September will help you to fine tune your strategy before the D-day. I was a 75 percent speed and 70

percept accuracy person earlier. After some hard work, I was able to cut down on my speed and improve my accuracy.

## **Some guidelines for Individual Sections**

### **Quantitative Ability**

I cannot emphasize enough on the need for identifying sitter questions in this section. Most of the time, solving 15-20 questions in a 50-question quant section will give you a percentile of 90 and above (sometimes, even 99). For me, QA had always been a strong point. So I used to solve more than 25 quant questions in most mock CATs and get good percentiles too.

From what I have learned from my preparation...

- Everyone has weak areas in quant. For me they were probability, permutations and combinations and I used to leave all questions from those topics.
- Most of the times, solving questions sequentially from 1-50 will not work.
- It is always better to give a shot to sets of questions. Something like 'A and B started from P and Q with 20 and 30 kmph speeds at 10 pm on a day...' followed by 5 questions. If you know the concept well, you can crack all the questions in that set.
- You must know three of the following topics to have an easy sail through the quant section – Algebra, Number Theory Mensuration or Geometry. See the last 3 years' CAT papers and you will know what I am talking about.
- Before starting the first mock, try to learn as many fundamental concepts as possible on QA topics. Use notes to jot down the unknown formulae and shortcuts.

- While analysing the QA Section, try to find out the sitter (easy) questions that you missed during the mock. And try to reason out why.
- have some thumb rules based on your strategy. I always...
- read and try to attempt 1-2 liner questions under any circumstances
- read and try to attempt questions on mensuration and geometry (you can recognise them easily because they have accompanying figures)
- read and try to attempt questions on logarithms and algebra
- start from somewhere in the middle of the section. Never work sequentially from 1 to 50.
- read and try to attempt sets of questions
- Most importantly, don't over-compare yourself with others. If QA is not your strength, don't even bother about how much the toppers are scoring in that section. Just try to clear the cutoffs and leave it at that. Don't crib about people attempting 35 questions. Instead, try to beat them using your strong points.

## **Data Interpretation**

I have only one thing to say about DI – PRACTISE!

## **Verbal Ability**

Well, I have talked about my poor English skills before. So, I am not the best guy to be commenting this. I never have been a topper in this area. But reading a lot surely does help.

## **The last mile to CAT 2003**

### **August - November, 2003**

During this period, I took at least 50 mock tests. My opinion on different mock tests...

- T.I.M.E.. AIMCATs - definitely the best as far as QA, DI, DS and LR are concerned. This year the VA and RC questions have been better. But they are nowhere near what the CAT VA and RC are like.

- IMS SimCATs, ACT, MCTs and FCTs - very good VA and RC papers. DI and QA are calculation heavy and sometimes kilometers away from what the actual CAT tests. But overall, decent papers.

- Career Launcher MockCATs and FLTs - decent English, QA and DI. Sometimes, brilliant DI. And no doubt one of the cheapest packages available in the market. I got some 30 tests for Rs 2,000.

Apart from the above three mock CATs, I subscribed for Ascent mock CATs, 10 papers for about Rs 900.

I made it a point that I took as many mocks as possible between August and November. In the beginning I used to take two mocks a week. In early September I increased it to three mocks a week and stuck to it till the end. Now, you might experience 'burnout' at times and if you feel that, you are probably going too fast and reach your peak performance before the actual CAT day and that is not a desirable thing, because you should be peaking on the CAT day. So if you feel a burnout, take a full one-week break from mock CATs and start again. Moreover, don't take too many mock tests in a week. At the most 4 mocks a week should suffice. But again, this is a personal choice and you should decide based on your performance. During the final 30 days to CAT, I analysed my old mock tests once again. During this period I made optimum use of the Excel sheet that I had compiled. I also realised that my accuracy was beginning to go down. So I tried to record all my errors in a notebook. And this helped me a lot in cutting down on my mistakes.



## **December, 2003 - February, 2004**

Throughout December and the first few weeks of January, I spent time on other exams and on work. I tried to do some RC preparation and was successful in improving a bit. After the FMS exam, I tried to focus on CAT. I did nothing fancy in this period. It was all the same – mock tests and analysis.

### **The D-Day**

At last February 15, 2004 came, the day of the CAT retest\*. I was excited about my results in other exams (IIFT, JMET and FMS). As usual I started the paper with the verbal section and solved 36 questions in 35 minutes.

I then moved to QA and tried to maximise my gains there. It took 40 minutes and in that time I had read most of the questions and attempted 32.

I then started with the DI section. Contrary to what people think about CAT 2003, I thought this section was tough. I could do only 25 questions in this section.

I did overall 93 attempts in CAT 2003. There were butterflies in the stomach, but my result turned out to be better.

And the rest, as they say, was history. Wish you all the very best in your efforts.

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

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\* We should point out that in 2003, the IIMs found that the CAT 2003 paper held on November 22 had been leaked and decided to cancel the paper and hold a retest in February 2004. The author of this article has decided to skip his experience with the cancelled test and has instead written only about the retest that happened on February 15, 2004.

# Anupam Majumdar

## Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore

### Class of 2006-08

**Scored 99.18 percentile in CAT 2005**



The story of an average guy who dared to dream BIG!

I was never interested in CAT. In my Engineering days at Institute of Information Technology, Calcutta (IIT Calcutta), I always aspired to be an IT nerd or should I say programming Geek! I had my eyes on GRE. The trend then was to work under a set of distinguished Professors, take the GRE when you were fully prepared, apply to the US Universities and then get a big chunk off your expenses using those coveted recommendations. My target was no different. But then what drove me to CAT?

I found some of my classmates glued to IMS/T.I.M.E. material right there in the second year. Hola! What was that and what exactly was CAT?

One of them replied: you don't know CAT? (with a big frown on his face! ) CAT is supposed to be an extremely tough exam (realised later, CAT's nothing but an extremely hyped test). You crack it and you make your way to the prestigious Indian Institutes of Management. Wow. Sounds attractive but why the hell should I pursue it? After all, I always wanted to become an IT nerd!

Prepared exclusively for Anupam Shrivastava

## **My NDA dreams still disturb me...**

I always wanted to be in the Air Force. I knew that being the only child of my parents I would be discouraged, but what the heck. I decided to take extreme steps.

When I was in the XI standard, I purchased the NDA (National Defence Academy) form, appeared for the test, got selected and was called for an SSB interview for the Indian Air Force at Dehradun. Went there, aced and got selected! And all these without caring to inform my parents!

Gosh! When the final call letter came, I got the bashing of my life. And for the first time in my life I cried. This is what I wanted to be.

Coming back to CAT. In the third year of Engineering we had to do a summer internship in an organization. I had offers from PriceWaterHouse Coopers and Tata Consultancy Services and was very sure to do it from PwC. But one of my pals came to my room one lovely evening and told me, “Hey, ditch PwC, we’re going to IIM Ahmedabadhmedbad!”

My reply: “IIM Ahmedabad? Pagal hai kya? What am I supposed to gain from there? I need corporate not IIM exposure.”

Somehow this pal of mine convinced me to ditch the corporate offers and join him. So here we went. Come June 2003 and we were on our way to the Mecca of Management!

All it takes is just 2 months. No more.

I still remember my first reactions when I stood right in front of IIM Ahmedabad. The reaction of a ‘wow’ on my lips and ‘awe’ in my belly.

The next two months were breathtaking. Me and my pal were put up in one of the dorms of IIM Ahmedabad. The workload was extreme to say the least, but fun never deserted us. I took my time to make a lot of wonderful acquaintances there. I saw people running with sandwiches clubbed in their mouths and hands in their zips; trying to zip the last thing before entering the classrooms.

Aw! What was this?

“We’ve a surprise test now, will catch you later,” was the reaction. I was dumbfounded. The next 15-20 days, I made it sure to take some time out of my work and observe the life of an MBA student, and the results were tempting!

The two months at IIM Ahmedabad were good enough to motivate me for CAT. Now, since I had to do something filmy, I went to a rock ( they call it the CEO’s rock primarily because most of the IIM Ahmedabad junta sits there and sips tea) touched the rock and promised to crack CAT! (To be very specific I promised to return to IIM Ahmedabad; only this time as a Post Graduate Program (PGP) student)

### **My first MOCK: Quant + DI are my strengths!**

Motivated, I returned to IIT Calcutta. This time with a determination to crack the CAT. Now what was the first thing to do? Take some material and start over? Nah. I decided to follow what IMS would ask of us.

So, one fine Sunday morning I set off for the nearest IMS center to take the preliminary test. The test was modeled on the pattern of CAT 2002, and I spent one hour with Quantitative Aptitude and the next one hour with DI/LR.

“Two hours up. Now students, please calculate your scores and let us know. Please note at this stage even if you score 20 you should be glad,” was the announcement.

Between 10-13 people took the test and their score hovered in the 15-25 marks range. I calculated my score. It was an encouraging 44.75 (with a negative marking of 0.25). “Wow,” remarked the counselor, “Did you take CAT before?”. “No,” I said with a broad smile. Oh boy, was I to crack CAT without any preparation?

The counselor asked my sectional breakups. I replied: 23.50 in Quant and 21.25 in DI. The smile on her face trimmed down to a frown. “What about English?”

“English. why the hell should I go for English when I can score in Quant/DI?”

What followed was roaring laughter (and it still rings!). Never had I felt so embarrassed before! The counselor explained to me that in CAT I need to perform equally well in all three sections; only then will I be eligible for the IIMs.

Afflicted and determined, I returned home.

### **CAT 2003: The prelude to my CAT expedition**

I enrolled for the IMS SimCAT that year. Since I started preparing on August 2003, I had had very little time to go through the basics. Honestly speaking I touched nothing of Quant/DI. The only thing which I worked on was RCs and a bit of vocabulary and grammar.

I never performed excellently in my mocks, but I was consistent. I usually hovered in the 97 to 98 percentile range and could clear the cutoffs only on 2 occasions out of 8! (Thanx to a section they call verbal ability!)

Then comes d-day and with it Goosebumps, henpicks, turkeysnippets and everything else.

The paper was given to us and the first thing I did was to smell it! At 11:00 am sharp, the invigilator said “START”.

11:35 am and I was still stuck with verbal ability. Would you believe it? Didn't touch a single RC by then. I could sense sweat everywhere.

12:00 pm done with verbal ability and one RC (so much for English & reading speed). With one hour left I had two sections but the best part was, they were my strengths.

12:30 pm done with DI – attempted 26 questions.

1:00 pm done with Quant – attempted 25 questions.

I quickly checked my attempts :  $26 + 25 + 32$  (English) = 83 attempts!

With a feeling not so good. I made my way back to my hostel. Was disappointed about not performing well in English. As soon as I reached my common room, someone came shouting, “CAT 2003 stands canceled, thanks to [Ranjit Don](#).”

### **PaGaLGuY.com: another forum on the wall?**

I knew God won't give me any better chance than this. Here I screw CAT and the test stands canceled --- what more can I ask? I have this habit of surfing the net during my free time and on one such occasion I bumped into an interesting forum named [www.pagalguys.com](#). The name struck me. 'Pagalguy', sounds cool, maybe some resemblance. “Let me check this,” I thought and what did I find there? With some 400-500 odd members, here we had an MBA forum which discussed almost everything under the sun! Whoa! That's my cake!

I found gods like philiptj (100 percentiler), puneet (100 percentiler) and many more who posted on the forum. Now I needed to jump in. What was the first thing? I created an ID and registered. So here it went, my first id on PG: vision\_mission.

I used to spend most of my time reading about how PaGaLGuY.com was created (thanks to Allwin), CAT 2003 scores and strategies. Slowly I started getting involved into a lovely community. It was so much fun to take a mock and post your scores and analysis; and the interaction was of high quality.

Then we had wonderful threads where we usually had heated discussions. PG.com was a part of life now.

### **CAT 2003: the retake**

“I may fail once, but now that God’s given me an opportunity, let me make best use of it.”

These were the words I said to myself when I entered the exam hall.

11:00 am sharp we started answering. I discover Quant/DI was tougher than the previous time while English looked the same!

11:25 and I was still stuck with verbal ability. “What the hell, was I going to repeat the same performance again?” “YES” I did!. I repeated the same performance.

11:55 pm and I was done with English (full VA and two RCs!) with just 65 minutes at hand, somehow I made hay of the other two sections. My attempts: 21 (Quant) + 27 (DI) + 34 (English) = 82 and another performance to crib about!

As soon as I left the exam hall. I could hear people shouting, “I attempted 105, arrey I attempted 110 and so on.” I knew I hadn’t done well!

With a lot of courage I calculated my score later that evening,

Quant: 14

DI : 21

English : 14.33

Overall: 49.33

All coaching institutes came up with their analysis with cutoffs at a strict 58 plus for at least one IIM (IMS went to extremes declaring 78 plus for at least one IIM Call).

That night I wept. All my aspirations were going down and to add to my woes, I was so confident that I had skipped the placements at my institute.

### **SP Jain & MDI to the rescue**

97.33 (99.40 in DI, 96 in Quant and 78 in English) was my final percentile in CAT 2003 and it was bad. I mean pretty bad considering I had my eyes on the IIMs. However I got calls from MDI and SP Jain. I attended the interviews since I’d applied to them. I was elated to know that I could make it to the merit lists of SPJ and MDI.

For a few moments I let go of my IIM Ahmedabad aspirations. First attempt at CAT and I could get into two of the best institutes in the country. Wasn’t it an achievement?

That evening, I called my pals at IIM Ahmedabad and informed them of my results. They were happy but one of them said, “Good.



But don't you think you can give CAT another chance? Remember your promise."

I soon realised my promise. All my joy was over in seconds. I knew I'd a mission to accomplish.

### **'anupam will return': Boy! What a strange ID?**

Those days we had this 'points' concept on PG wherein you could add colours or sparkles to your online profile on PaGaLGuY in exchange of points. The points were generally earned and we had some generous divas who actually donated them too! One could also change his user-id in exchange for 3,000 points and this is exactly what I did.

Overnight vision\_mission vowed to return for CAT 2004. This time as: 'anupam will return'!

Final year in engineering, the first thing I wanted to do was to get placed and then prepare for CAT. I needed a company which could offer me a cool life. After some analysis I chose TCS.

I also felt the need to network, form study groups and go on with the preparation. Being in Calcutta I knew very few people from PG there. Most of my time I'd be online on PG trying my hands at the Quant threads/verbal ability sections.

One day I come across Praveen Agarwal (whocarez on PaGaLGuY) who was also preparing for CAT 2004. The platform was set. I enrolled for the T.I.M.E. AIMCATs this time. I felt the need to enroll for another Mock CAT series and hence enrolled for CL too.

Every Sunday we had AIMCATs and every Monday whocarez and I used to meet and spend the next three to four hours analyzing the

paper at Barista or Cafe Coffee Day outlets. They issued us regular membership coupons for our cinematic visits!

This group study thing worked. My performance in the mocks skyrocketed. The first 8 AIMCATs, I got into the top 100 on six occasions (and cleared the cutoffs every time).

Consistency is the key to success and I was proving it again and again!

18 mocks in T.I.M.E., I got into the top 100 on 11 occasions.

10 mocks in CL, I got outside the top 100 only once!

I was pretty sure I was going to make it BIG this time. At nights I used to sleep and imagine the same Rock at IIM Ahmedabad. I knew I was getting close to my dreams.

I was soon placed at TCS and had to go to Trivandrum for my initial learning program. Ten days into my training (in October), one night I got a call from my mother; my father was ill and I would have to rush back home.

### **CAT 2004: Turbulent times**

My father was serious but thanks to the almighty he was recovering. CAT had slipped out of my mind for some time.

November 12: I realised I had to rush to Kozhikode for my CAT. After all I'd spent two years preparing for it. 15th November, I made my way to the spice capital of India.

CAT 2004 had this one and two markers which tested our on-the-spot judgment skills as well. I remember the day. It was one of the worst days of my life.

I always thought DI and Quant were my strengths. CAT 2004 proved me wrong!

This time I completed my verbal ability section in 20 minutes and went on to attack DI (supposedly my strength --- 99.40 in CAT 2003). But alas! What is this DI? I misread a one-marker caselet in DI and spent 10 minutes there without attempting a single question. The pressure was mounting and I had attempted a paltry eight or nine questions in 30 minutes. I was sweating. Never ever in my life had I come under so much pressure in a comfort section. I cursed T.I.M.E./CL/IMS for not introducing me to such a pattern! But I had to attempt questions, the curses could come later on.

Jittery, I moved to Quant. The relatively easy Quant section helped me cool down my nerves. Once Quant was done I moved to RCs and this time completed three RCs in 25 minutes. With just ten minutes remaining, I moved back to DI. The next 10 minutes were nightmarish, couldn't think of a strategy to attempt the DI section. "Shame on me," I said under my breath.

1:00 pm : "STOP" was the call. I knew I'd come up with another award winning performance!

### **Pune gets a son, I a family**

After my initial learning program at TCS, I was asked to move to Pune. A new city, new friends, a new environment were all I needed for a recharge. I resolved to continue with the combined study group formula. With whocarez getting into IIM Calcutta, I knew this formula was a sure success. The need of the hour were some like-minded people.

The first person whom I met in Pune was Sachin Kadam (Govi on PaGaLGuY). A guy who by appearance looked the academic types.

“Wow, seems I’m going to enjoy some serious gyaan sessions now,” I thought.

Together we penned down a plan to form a study group. The way to find people would be through a Pune PG meet. I heard from Govi that Pune PG meets were usually dull with very few people turning up every time. We resolved to change things this time. So the stage was set for the first ever Pune PG meet of 2005!

At the same time I got a message from someone named Aarav on PaGaLGuY (his real name was Rahul Sharma).

“Aarav, hmm... who the hell is he?” I remember coming across so many PGites but Aarav? Had never even heard an 'A' of him before.

The mystery uncovered itself when we met and I was sitting in a Barista with the legendary Ghulam (who had changed his PaGaLGuY ID to Aarav), a person whom I respected (and still do) for his moral and ethical values (not to mention his Quant skills).

The first Pune PG meet was a big success and helped me get in touch with some really serious aspirants: Govi, itsrahul, Catalytic, Jackal, Subu, Aarav and myself.

I got the family that I had always wanted!

### **Way to CAT 2005: Fun, frolic and a friendship to cherish**

Pune PG meets became the routine of the day. Every week we had a PG meet with most of the regulars turning up and everytime we had this burst of newbies who seldom came the next time! The first All India PG meet was held at Essel World in Mumbai. Pune was well represented by Manpreet, Aarav and myself. It was a wonderful meet! I met the likes of Allwin (pagalguY), Apurv, Subbu (urMad), Sowmya (Simba) amongst the biggies.

I made two new friends, Monil (reachmonil) and Rohit (estranged\_gnrs) there.

I was impressed by Monil and Rohit. Their attitude was positive to the core. With a gleam of determination in their eyes I could feel these ones were set for a big future!

After coming back to Pune, we had a meet after every MockCAT, with Aarav's home being the preferred venue; thanks to his bachelorhood and the house's locational advantage.

Tied up by a hectic schedule, Sachin made it a point to pay us a visit whenever possible while itsrahul was at his very best with accuracy in mocks. Both Govi and itsrahul were very similar when it came to demeanor. They were both the corporate types.

And it was fun! Studying at Aarav's house till late in the evenings, rounding that off with a movie and then back again.

### **Hyderabad chapter: A geek and a clown meets... well... another clown!**

On the office front my workload was increasing and I had to sacrifice my job-appraisals for my CAT aspirations. I was soon shifted to a new assignment which required more than just hard labor.

My new assignment forced me to go to Hyderabad. My formula had to continue there too; thus I bumped into a geek (Aditya aka HAHAAHA on PaGaLGuY) and a clown (anandv).

I learned a lot from the two; be it attempting five RCs in 25 minutes or attempting MockCATs in 90 minutes! Competition was something these two guys taught me. Not to forget those analysis sessions when all of a sudden the clown would crack the weirdest of PJs and bring down the mood of the discussion to more bearable levels.

## **CAT 2005: The grand finale**

I wasn't more prepared this time. Realistically speaking, I was mentally stronger this time. I knew lady luck had been eluding me for quite sometime but if I remained patient and persevered, my goal was not far away.

The moment I saw it was a 90 question paper, it dawned on me that the paper would be slightly tougher than the previous ones and the focus needed to be on accuracy.

I always started off with English (as this was not only my weakest section but also the section where I marked more number of bubbles in the least time), I gave some 42-45 mins to English and attempted questions worth 41 marks. I did have this feeling that I may not end up with a satisfactory score in this section but thanks to my pathetic accuracy (ended up with a net score of 17.66) I decided the only way out for me was to attempt more number of questions. (People strong in English will surely come up with better methods of tackling this section).

Next, I came to my strength: Quantitative Aptitude. I realised I had more scoring opportunities in the two markers, hence gave 20 minutes to the two markers and attempted six of them. The next ten minutes were spent with the one markers where I attempted just six questions.

My net score in Quant in 30 minutes was 15.33 (got one two-marker wrong).

Now I had 45 minutes in my hand. I decided to move on to my next strong section: DI and LR, but for a moment thought I needed a better score in English, hence moved back to Verbal. With almost all questions answered in verbal, I found I hadn't answered the Derrida RC (my BIGGEST mistake!). I spent some 6-7 minutes on the RC

and to my horror found none of the questions answerable! I decided to mark one answer (went for a blind fluke! Mistake number two).

I realised I had around 35-36 minutes left for DI. In CAT 2004 I was murdered in DI. So for a moment I wondered if I was going to repeat that performance yet again. I again found that there were one markers and two markers present here. Although the two markers were more scoring, I decided to attempt the one markers first ( to give me bits of confidence). Spent some ten minutes there and attempted questions worth seven marks. Next, I moved to the two markers. Since I had 25 minutes left, I first attacked the tennis caselet and finished it off in ten minutes. Next I went to the Olympic caselet, spent some three to four odd minutes there, but couldn't make much sense of it. For a moment, I made up my mind to take my chances and so some guesswork but Holla! CAT 2004 performance's haunted spirit stopped me from doing so. Next went to the UP/Bihar caselet and cracked it just in time.

My net score in DI was 15.33.

I knew I'd not done as well as I wanted it to be.

Frustrated, I wrote down a suicide note. A note which made me famous.

The response to that note was tremendous, even today when I sit back and remember those days, I get emotional.

January 2, 2006 - the results arrived and I ended up with **BLACKI**. Alas, lady luck had smiled.. The results were declared at 12:00 am on 2nd January. I didn't have the guts to check my results, so the man put on the mission – Aarav, informed me of my calls.

I was overjoyed, I punched the air a la Brett Lee, but alas my joy was shortlived. Most of my study mates (Aarav, Govi, Monil, Rohit, teesra\_banda) hadn't made it to the next stage.

## **Next comes Vengeance: The GD/PI journey**

It was sheer fun, waking up at 5:30 in the morning, strolling my way across Banjara hills and waiting for Aditya (HAHAHA) and his bike. He seldom came on time.

The two of us used to go for T.I.M.E. classes at Secunderabad. Attended GD sessions and analysed our performance while returning. That was good!

## **Refugee at Mumbai!**

Networking has a lot of merit and being a refugee at estranged\_gnr's place proved it right!

For all my five interviews I must admit that I troubled Rohit and Vijay (teesra\_banda) with food, Internet and sleep; Beers must have enjoyed those paranthaas, not to mention Aryak!

11th April, 2006: Chickenpox struck me and I rested on my hospital bed, away from PG.com. I grew restless. The final results were to come tomorrow. "Will my fate be sealed tomorrow? Do I have the courage to contest for one more year?" I wondered.

That night I got a phone call from Aarav greeting me in his typical manner: "Hello Sir, kya haal chaal hai?" ("Hello sir, How are you?")

I knew this was one guy who had made me feel good for the first time in three years. I knew he had another mission.

"Man on a mission, 12th april kal hai and you are going to let me know my final IIM results. No matter what happens, good/bad, you are calling me and informing me."

Man on mission said, "Aye sir, as you wish!"



## **Redemption or The Return?**

12th April, 2006: I still lay in my hospital cabin and Aarav's call woke me up at 12:06 am.

“Congratulations Sir, you've done it! IIM Calcutta both PGDM & PGDCM converted!”

I woke up. Was it a dream? No, it wasn't. My CAT journey had ended. I couldn't believe it!

Joy and tears compounded me. Another Brett Lee puncho!

Morning came and Aarav called up with the remaining results: that of Bangalore, Lucknow, Indore and Kozhikode. My story with CAT had reached full circle!

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# **Deepa Swaminathan**

## **Mudra Institute of Communications, Ahmedabad Class of 2004-06**

The Early Years: The first time I heard about CAT was in Class XII, when I thought MBA was for Commerce graduates.

The second time was in first year of graduation. I was wondering what I should PG (postgraduate) in. I knew it had to be a communications/journalism related field. Looked up the MICA site and saw that they select through CAT. At that time I thought, “Oh... CAT's that super-tough test. Not worth slogging it out if I'm going apply to only one institute.”

Over the next couple of years I met people who had actually taken the test, and it didn't really sound super tough. Still, the profile of the average CAT-taker appeared to be Techies-who-hate-coding or Engineers-who-wanna-do-something-else.

Summer of 2003, my decision was finally made. Thanks to a combo of friends in B-Schools, an old Math teacher from my school days, CNBC - corporate India suddenly appeared very glamorous. IMS, CL successfully sold CAT to me. I decided, management, or more specifically, communications management was my calling.

## **The Preparation**

So, I targeted MICA, signed up at IMS, Hyderabad in April-May 2003 for the classroom course. Also started with the customary worship of ET, BT, BW, and CNBC India.

I took the prelim test at IMS and found I almost maxed the VA/RC section. Quant, I wasn't so good. LR & DI were cool. Religiously attended the 6:30 am classes at IMS. Rushed back home, grabbed books and rushed to college in the opposite direction. I'd be solving Quant sheets during ImmunoGenetics lectures in college. I enjoyed every minute of the preps, because I liked Math.

Never “worked” on VA/RC. I don't believe in concepts of Reading Speed & stuff that IMS prescribes. Instinct helped a lot in this section.

For DI, I tried to learn the speed calculation techniques etc, but on Test Day, I don't think I used any of it.

So, CAT preps took up about 1 or 2 hours a day from April-September. Most of it was for Quant. Solved every problem from BRMs & section tests. Dug out my CBSE math books & worked with those too.

## **The Mock Tests**

I took tests at IMS & PRIME. Also solved all the T.I.M.E. mocks at home. Invariable fell short of the cut-offs in Quant. I cleared all SIMCAT cut-offs only 3 times. Lowest rank was in 1800s, highest was 21 (IMS). Averaged between 50 and 400 otherwise.

I found the feedback sessions awfully frustrating. “Recognizing sitters” was something that I couldn't perfect. The take-home tests

were decidedly easier but somehow, I couldn't carry the form into the SIMs.

## **November 23rd & After**

LeakCAT came and went. I felt I had done decently. But not close enough to the scores posted on PG. Shut my books till Jan 1st. FMS was around the corner, so I restarted preps. Panicked a bit because I had no material left to solve. So, I signed up for the CL take-home tests. Suddenly I had a deluge of papers to solve. Went at the rate of a-paper-a-day, till ReCAT. Got calls from FMS & NMIMS meanwhile.

## **Feb 15th**

Felt decently prepared. Did the test. Came out feeling I had messed up DI, I should have attempted more. I was a nervous wreck till the online solutions came out. Then it hit me: DI was okay, it was Quant that I screwed up royally. Still, I had hopes. But the minute I entered my CAT No. On the IIM Bangalore GD/PI call page, they crashed. IIM Bangalore was my dream-school for a while, but I guess Lady Luck listens only to your first wish.

Final position in CAT: Overall a 99.38 percentile; 99.57 in VA/RC, 97.3 in DI. 77.7 in Quant.

Applied: IIMs, SPJain, MICA.

Calls: MICA

## **Interviews**

In hindsight FMS was a sad story. They hated my profile, suspicious about the “BSc in Genetics” background. NMIMS was disgusting too, last person in panel to be interview in a session where 90 people had GD/PI. Didn't have any hopes.

MICA was far far far better. Profile was appreciated, even respected. Questions were friendly. GD was dull, but still managed to make a point. A “feel-good” experience.

## **The Wait**

Was shocked to find that I was waitlisted at MICA. An excruciating 20-day wait, & I was in.

## **So, The pre-MBA experience**

It had highs and lows but it was a wonderful 10 months. Met a lot of people, made some wonderful friends (at IMS, at PG, at interviews), learnt a LOT. There were some sacrifices made too. Had to give up freelance assignments which popped up during crucial prep days; missed out on a lot of college activities, quizzes etc; also went through a break-up.

But those were ten months of my life that I'll always treasure. Getting admission ensured a sweeter end to the pre-MBA process. Because I'm not sure whether I'd have had the will to go through it all again.

## **Lessons learnt**

I don't have an MBA-call-getter profile: “Life Science graduate from Hyderabad” (as opposed to “Engineer” or “Grad-from-swanky-Delhi-college”) and no full-time work-ex. Still, no regrets, I can't complain because I ended up getting to what I initially aimed for - MICA.

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# Amit Agarwal

## Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta Batch of 2008-10

**Cracked the CAT while already studying at FMS Delhi**



### **A Journey called CAT**

IIM – The acronym every b-schooler aspires for in India. I being not too different from others had similar aspirations, desires and dreams. Oh yes, forgot to mention the common full form of IIM: Indian Institute of Management; but I came to know of another full form during this journey, which will be eventually revealed to all.

Where do I start from? Let me go back to April of the year 2000. It was the time when my sister made it to the well... Joka land. it was the time when I was preparing for my engineering and had already made up my mind to make it to an IIM.

First two and a half years of Engineering went fine but it's generally in the third year when one starts thinking about 'what next!' Then I joined Career Launcher in Delhi in my fifth semester and little did I know that I was not the only one aspiring in my batch. I met the junta of my college Netaji Subhash Institute of Technology (NSIT) there. The classes started and very soon I realised the weakest link for me to the ultimate goal – the VERBAL part. Anyhow, my senior gave me this wonderful advice of taking CAT in the third year to get

a “feel” of the exam. I liked the idea and finally took it. And yes, at that time, CAT had no rule which barred people taking the exam who are not in their final years. I think it is because of people like me that they thought of this rule. It's good to be a reason which made IIMs take a policy decision.

### **CAT attempt # 1: Year 2002 in November**

It was a normal 3 section paper in which I had no pressure to perform. The paper went fine and it was the first time wherein the percentiles were to be revealed. Moving to the results, QA was 99.5 percent with an 86 odd in DI and some 65 in verbal. This clearly told me where I had to work on – as if I didn't know it before.

Jan 2003 – Oct 2003 – The time when all of my friends, classmates and everyone and anyone was a CAT aspirant. It was good to be in excellent company and I think that competition forced me to prepare for the exam which eventually I think I did.

### **CAT attempt # 2: Year 2003 in November**

Was I nervous??!! I was. This was the day, the time, the 2 hours which are going to decide the future for me. I still remember how the exam went. The sound of opening the sheet, the answer sheet being filled, the sweat, the tension – everything is still like a movie in my mind. Anyhow, in the end I was quite happy with my performance in DI and QA. Also, I knew that I had done well in Verbal because the two RCs which I attempted in the exam were luckily from some of the test mock papers of the institutes.

But then disaster struck as soon as I crossed the gates of the school of my centre when my mother told me, “Amit, CAT is cancelled. The paper got LEAKED last night.”

I was like noooooooooooooooooo, it's difficult to give your best again.

Well, with no option left in life, I started preparing for my semester exams.

Forgot to mention this, three weeks before CAT, I had a disc collapse in my back which forced me into bed rest for two weeks which also meant no studies, nothing. However, I think that did not have any adverse effects on my CAT preparation.

Ah yeah, had that CAT not been cancelled, I would have never joined PaGaLGuY.com.

Year 2004 came and I had already done the greatest mistake of my life by filling just 3 forms – CAT, XAT and MDI. The XAT exam was next and with so much verbal focus that I knew it was difficult to clear it. But then trying was important, which I did and eventually failed also. But since CAT was still there, I thought to myself that I still have a chance to make it to my dream school.

### **CAT attempt # 3: Year 2004 in February**

After being there already, I was not as nervous but yeah, pressure to perform kills you. The exam was a bit on the tougher side but it went fine. In this Internet age, the solutions were out by the evening but I had decided not to check till the next day.

Next day, I started checking my paper. As always, I started here also with Quant. The performance was sufficient enough to clear the cut-off. I don't know what prompted me to check verbal next. I did and was amazed to see my score and was already jumping in my room but hang on, story is not over yet.

I checked DI then and my world came crashing down. I had attempted four caselets and got two of them ABSOLUTELY WRONG!!! I scored a single digit in DI; it was something I was not prepared for, why why why!!! After not being able to make it in IIT-JEE because of Maths, again DI did me in.



Crying made me no better and I knew that it was bye bye IIMs and MDI.

The results came out as expected and I was prepared for it. Some of my close friends had all six calls or single call or some calls at least. Most of them made it and then we parted on our different paths in life.

I joined HCL Technologies in Delhi in July and was sure of cracking CAT this time. One intelligent thing that I did this time was widening my b-school list – IIMs, XLRI, NITIE, MDI, SP Jain, IIFT and FMS. This meant I had to take four exams this time and that too with my job. Also, somehow I got a really good project in the company which required me put in a lot of effort. I could have avoided work but somehow it's in my nature to give 100 percent to everything that is entrusted on me. That year, I went to office for 29 days in October 2 days off being October 2 (thanks to Gandhiji) and Dusshera (Thanks to God Ramchandra); else I would have been in office then too. Add to this was a family problem which required me to spend 3 months (nights) in hospital as my grandfather was ill. When I look back, I wonder how I managed all this. Oh one more thing, my sister wedding plans was also underway which required my inputs and participation too.

### **CAT attempt # 4: Year 2004 in November**

The exam time came. CAT, XAT, IIFT and FMS. Results: calls from IIM Lucknow, MDI, IIFT and NITIE. I was confident of converting one call at least this time. CAT percentile overall was 98.94. Also, this was the time when PaGaLGuY shot to fame with that result link getting exposed and all. This was the first CAT in which differential marking was introduced.

Jan 2005 – MDI interview, my first b-school GD/PI experience. Somehow managed the GD and went in the interview. Interview was

okie-dokie. With next three interviews in March, I had loads of time to prepare for them.

Feb 28, 2004 – MDI results were out. Not selected, not even in the waitlist, was I that bad? Maybe yes. With around ten days to go, I left no stone unturned to prepare for the other GD/PIs. Next interview was NITIE in Mumbai on 8th March, 2004 (which was my birthday too).

March 7, 2004 – Disaster will be an understatement with what happened. I slept with a little back pain but just could not lift myself up from the bed. The pain in my lower back was killing me and even lying straight was not helping. We rushed to the hospital and I was diagnosed with slip disc. Three weeks bed rest, no movement allowed. My NITIE interview was the next day, IIFT in three days and IIM-L in ten days. No way was I going to miss them.

I had to get admitted in the hospital and doctor did not allow me to move at all. This meant, all pleadings for attending interviews for NITIE went waste. IIFT also went by and I sat there; could not do anything about it – just cry a bit, ok, not a bit but a little more.

I had on my mind, come what may – I will attend my IIM interview. When the doctor heard the word “IIM”, he also became a little soft and asked me to postpone it as much as possible. We tried our best but the next date given was still within my bed-rest period. With some change in his heart, he allowed me to take the interview.

The GD was bad for me as the pain was still there and it was bad. I had to wait for nearly three hours for my interview and that aggravated the pain. Somehow, I braved it and faced the interview panel. It was an above average PI but performance in GD was still enough to ensure that I didn't get in.

The results came and I was waitlisted at 107. This is when I joined PaGaLGuY.com and my first post was on the IIM Lucknow thread.

After months of praying and tracking the WL day and night, it closed at 102!!!

I applied for a transfer to Mumbai to stay with my parents and take care of my back. Eventually the company did transfer me and I landed here in Mumbai. I joined the T.I.M.E. test series and was doing pretty fine but the office culture here was really bad. For the first six months from July to December, there was not a single day when I did not contemplate resigning.

### **CAT attempt # 5: Year 2005 in November**

I added one more exam in my list – JMET. Exams came and went and somehow I screwed ALL of them. CAT 97 percentile, XAT 99 percentile, JMET – 500 plus rank and similarly all. All but one – FMS. Had calls from both the courses and went to Delhi for the interview. MBA-MS GD was average, PI was also average. Then came the MBA-FT day. That time, people having both FMS calls did not have the process the same day. Since I had become quite visible on PG, I met many familiar people. GD was excellent and PI was also good but FMS thought otherwise. My name did not figure in both the list, not even the waitlist. This was the very famous 1:1 ratio batch of FMS.

One interesting thing about XAT. Had a 99.9 plus percent in both DI and QA but 86.80 or something in Verbal. Basically I missed the verbal cut-off by 0.01 percent. With two years work experience already in my kitty and entering the third year, the GMAT option was also available. In April, I registered for a June date for my GMAT and also joined T.I.M.E. classes for CAT preparation. I knew it was NOW or NEVER. PG was a really big help for GMAT and after 3 months of study, I scored a 710. This is where I realised that I personified the other 'IIM' - the 'Indian IT Male'. Most of the applicants from India fall in this category and no wonder it is really difficult to get in US b-schools when you are an 'IIM'.

Had plans to apply to only three schools – ISB Hyderabad, CMU Tepper and Goizueta Emory. The application process in these is a pain but in the end, it is quite insightful. One comes to know so much about oneself. Coupled with this, I was attending classes in T.I.M.E. and working too. Somehow, I stuck the right chord in mocks and was posting on PG big time. I earned the label of “sophisticated spammer” which I still disagree to. I am not and never was a spammer.

October, November 2005 – had interview calls from all three schools – ISB, Tepper and Goizueta. CAT day was also coming. I was done with my ISB interview (which was very very arbit) and Tepper interview over phone before CAT. The last interview was scheduled in Mumbai in December as a part of the World MBA Tour. Both the US b-school interviews were pretty straight-forward – Why MBA, strengths, weakness etc.

### **CAT attempt # 6: Year 2006 in November**

The five options paper for CAT, man I had seen it all. Started with Quant and killed it. Moved to the most arbit verbal paper ever and then did DI. When the solutions came in the evening, verbal had left me hanging, well almost. By the way, SP Jain was out of the hit list.

Dec 2006 – Jan 2007: Worst time of my life. Rejects from ISB, Tepper and Goizueta. CAT result out. 100 percentile in QA, 95 in DI and 82 in verbal. It was over for me. With just 5 days to go for XAT, I had no option but to give it my best. It was verbal and verbal and just more verbal.

7th Jan, 2007 – In the XAT paper itself, I knew that finally I had cracked verbal. Meanwhile, JMET had given me a rank of 39 and calls from IIT Bombay, Delhi and Kharagpur materialised. MDI also found me suitable for the GD/PI, even NITIE thought the same.

20th Jan, 2007 – The evening before the FMS paper. Just went online for something and saw the XLRI result link. With all my confidence, I punched in my roll number and saw the familiar message, “Sorry...” WTF!!!! How how how? Then clicked on the scorecard link. QA 99 something, Verbal 95.42, scorecard is not over yet, DI 77 percentile This was just not possible. I gave up all hope of ever doing an MBA.

Took the FMS exam next day and also prepared for the upcoming GDs and PIs. Then someone advised me about the MAT route to JBIMS and Maharashtra-CET was also added on the exam taking list. MAT went awesome and 99.99 percentile with a composite score of 800 ensured that JBIMS was within reach now. All the interviews came one by one and I attended all of them. Some in Mumbai, some in Delhi, GOD! It was maddening. Filling forms, carrying the requisite stuff etc was quite arduous.

Finally came the news I was waiting to hear all my life.

13th March, 2007, 2230 hrs. A friend of mine called from FMS and here was the result – Waitlist 1. FMS it was. MBA-MS result was Waitlist 7. By the way, I attended my MDI and IIT Bombay interviews after my FMS convert. Though, people advised me against it but since the colleges had taken a lot of my hard earned money I decided to take them.

Well, in the end, I had all converts – FMS (both), JBIMS, IITs (all 3), MDI and NITIE. It was Delhi again for me. I resigned from my job and then decided to utilize my time by teaching in T.I.M.E.. This is where ARKS Sir (ARKS Srinivas, T.I.M.E. Director, Mumbai) said to me, “Amit, CAT ek baar aur likh de.” (Amit, please write the CAT once more for me). I was like no, never sir. I was tired of writing it. We left it there.

July came and I was in FMS Delhi. Met some of the sharpest people

in the country and some awesome faculty. After one month of grilling, I called up ARKS and told him that FMS is not chill at all. And people, I am serious. During that phone call, again the CAT thing came up and he said “Mere liye likh de.” (Please write CAT once more for me). I told him I couldn't do it now anymore, no time to study and all. He somehow convinced me to fill the form and I did it. Just filled the form and no preparation. No test series. There was no time in FMS with the coursework, then summers, then exams so everything was packed. And whatever time I had in life, I ensured that I slept well.

### **CAT attempt # 7: Year 2007 in November**

CAT was on the 18th and our first semester exams got over on the 15th evening. 15th and 16th were spent in chilling out in life and 17th was taken away by cleaning my room. The only sane thing I did on 17th was sleeping at 2230 hours. Next day, I went to the exam centre which was nearby to the hostel, thankfully. From there, I called ARKS again and told him that I still didn't know why I was doing this. Finally, the paper started and it was exciting to do Math after so many months. Did QA, then Verbal and finally DI. Came back to the room and slept. In the evening, got up and checked the score. QA and DI were fine but as always a 20 in verbal according to T.I.M.E. keys. My score varied from 15 to 25 depending on institute keys. In either case, I was not clearing cut-off for verbal according to any of the institutes. So, it was over.

Life moved on, and then came the day of the CAT results. However bad one performs, there is always a desire to check the result. The link given on the CAT IIM site was not working from the hostel. Then I came to know about the result by SMS thing. I SMSed and received the following reply,

QA (percentile) 99.98 with a score of 70  
DI (percentile) 99.97 with a score of 76

Verbal (percentile) 96.40 with a score of 30

Overall (percentile) 99.99 with a score of 176

**YES YES YES I HAD CRACKED IT!!!** Calls started coming in and had all 6 calls. I was elated. But then, I had another problem. How will I justify leaving FMS in the interviews? FMS is awesome, why should one leave it. I had no clue what to do. The interview schedule came and the forms too. Took a lot of help from ARKS for the same and prepared for the interview. I knew what to prepare – MBA academics and why chuck FMS for an IIM.

The first interview was IIM Lucknow. A pretty decent GD and average PI. Next was IIM Kozhikode. An average GD and bad PI. Indore was next but had a very important class to attend in FMS so decided against it. By the way, both K and L asked about FMS.

The Big One was next – Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. And man, I was nervous. The essay was fine and PI was a dream one. They just could not believe that someone wants to leave FMS and come to IIM Ahmedabad. I think I did a pretty decent job there and rest of the questions varied from work experience to MBA academics to general stuff in life.

IIM Calcutta was next. A decent case study discussion followed by stress interview. Was asked Maths, Sub Prime, Telecom War, Quiz, FMS and everything.

Bangalore was the last one to be held. The date clashed with my second semester exams of FMS and it must have taken like 10,000 calls to them to get it shifted. Finally, it was shifted to the evening slot of the same day with my exam in the morning and another exam the next morning and interview sandwiched in between. The case study was the ‘Scrablous’ one and the group was quite decent in discussing the stuff. I was last to be interviewed. It was **HORRIBLE**. It was so so so bad that they would have left a seat vacant in the college rather

than take me.

With interviews over, summer internship was something which was coming up. But, Supreme Court had other plans\*. I was also a part of the waiting pain but had no window to vent out the frustration because it was a secret I wanted to keep. By the way, my FMS classmates came to know about my CAT somehow in January itself. I know who did it but have not done anything to that person. But I still have time to do it.

May 1 was about to dawn, I slept without much tension in life. Was woken at 7 a.m. by a friend's call informing me about IIM Bangalore results being out. I checked and as expected, did not get through. I had to go the office and was on my way. Meanwhile, another friend called me and told me to check the waitlist of IIM Bangalore. He checked for me and no; I was not there, as expected though.

I reached office and realised that the wi-fi was not working on my laptop (Murphy's Law at its best). I went to the IT guys and they needed "some" time to fix it. Just then, another person called me to tell me about IIM Calcutta results being out. I sat on the IT guys head as I wanted my laptop back up and running. After 20-25 minutes of patience, the laptop was handed back to me.

The first thing I did was, check the IIM Calcutta result. Opened the link, entered my details; my heart was beating fast as never before. And there it was, "CONGRATULATIONS!!!" Just could not believe it. Tears of joy trickled down my eyes. I was IN. FINALLY IN!!!!

I got through L and K too but surprisingly A ditched me. But no issues... JOKA IT WAS!

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\* Amit is referring to the deadlock that was created after the Government of India decided to implement OBC reservation in IIMs. The period saw widespread protests across the country and the matter went to Supreme Court where the CAT results were held up until the verdict was passed.



I want to clarify two matters about which I have been receiving a lot of queries.

1. Is FMS not good?

People, it is an awesome college; I just took CAT for the heck of it and my stay in FMS had nothing to do with it. So, please don't get me wrong here. Go ahead and join without batting an eyelid.

2. Justifying interview panel about leaving FMS and going to IIM

My answer was a very planned out one and was structured in a way so that no cross questioning was possible, thanks to ARKS Srinivas sir again.

Some of the quotes which I had heard over so many years are really true,

1. Patience pays

2. Effort never goes waste

3. Samay se pehle aur kismet se zyada kuch nahin milta and the likes (No one gets anything before the right time and more than what destiny has to offer).

But my personal favourite is the one which my cousin said once she heard the result – “Finally, CAT ki aatma ko shanti mili” (The soul of CAT finally rests in peace).

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# **KIMSTER**

## **Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, New Delhi Class of 2007-09**

Here goes my story.

### **CAT 2005**

In my sixth semester of Engineering I decide to join a coaching class (IMS) for taking CAT 2005. QA and DI were my strongest points, thanks to my pretty decent calculation speed. I had a problem with VA, especially RC but was good in VR (verbal reasoning). Came the first SimCAT and I was thrilled to get a AIR in 160s, next I took a free CL test and my rank was in the 50s. Except for two SimCATs where my rank was a 800 and a 1000 (something) I was lucky enough to be in the first 300 consistently (including a number of two digit ranks in SimCATs and free AIMCATs). So I kept my expectations really high and decided to apply only to MDI apart from IIMs under CAT. Had also applied to JMET and XAT (Because my mentor insisted on it, was never comfortable with the XAT pattern).

On the day of CAT, I was all tensed and nervous because of few personal things, had slept only for six hours (that too thanks to a sleeping pill, which I was using for the first time in my life). When I received the paper I saw that it's the two mark and one mark pattern with only 90 questions (change from the one-mark-for-all-questions pattern). The first ten minutes of the exam were the toughest, I was hardly able to concentrate and I was sweating a lot, I jumped to the two mark questions of VA directly and did questions like logical

ending of a sentence, picking the correct/incorrect statements etc, gave only 35 minutes for VA and jumped to my strongest sections: DI and QA.

When I came out of the exam hall, I had a pretty bad feeling that my performance wasn't satisfactory. I went back to the hotel room to know that I had screwed up pretty bad, as for VA the question had asked to identify the correct statements and I had identified the incorrect ones, there were four questions of that sort. I was devastated, as I had answered only few questions in VA and was counting on the grammar part and all of a sudden I had -2.66 (four negatives) to cover.

When the results came out I was not shocked to know that my VA is only 90.xx and a measly overall of 97.xx (had only 94 percentile for QA) so overall I was very disappointed to say the least.

Important lesson: Just relax the day before and the time you take the exam, very easy for me to preach. The important thing is a cool head.

**Calls 2005:** IIT Bombay and Delhi (Didn't convert either).

## **CAT 2006**

I had gotten a job with a leading Indian software company but had postponed the joining date to the week after CAT. That gave me four dedicated months to prepare for CAT. The performance in Mock-tests were really pleasing with the worst rank being 600 for one SimCAT and rest in the first 250 consistently for SimCATs and free tests of other institutes.

Day of CAT: This was like a do-or-die situation for me (I had taken a four-month sabbatical only for CAT) the pattern had changed to four marks per question, as usual I answered VA first, the situation was

the same as first CAT, not surprisingly at all, I was unable to concentrate, the RCs just did not make any sense. I just watched what my neighbour was doing (did not copy). Then somehow managed to continue to the other two sections.

Result : A pathetic -3 Marks (!!!!) for VA, had pretty good score in other two but what is the use when you have a 40 percentile in VA?

Important lesson : Keep a cool head. Don't bother about the stakes

**2006 Calls:** IIFT, IIT Bombay and Delhi (Didn't convert any)

## **2007 CAT**

I was a working professional then, so hardly had any time for preparation. Was a part-time faculty for QA and preparing for the classes I was taking was the only preparation I had. Time was passing for me and I didn't want to take CAT one more year, so decided to take all exams: SNAP, NMIMS, JMET, CAT, XAT, IIFT (Missed FMS somehow). By this time I had a reputation of not being able to handle pressure, so I decided not to carry any dream about IIMs.

Took Aimcats and SimCATs this year, was very happy with my performance, had AIR 12 in SIM CAT and AIR 22 in AIM CAT as my highest rank and AIR 600 in AIM CAT as my lowest rank.

## **The Actual CAT**

The same old story, the first 15 minutes, I was totally blank, again VA was the first section, found DI pretty easy.

Result: VA 76.76, overall: 98+ percentile with a 99.xx in DI.

I was surprised to see an IIM-K call through Other Backward Category (OBC) (80 percentile- one more mark in VA would have given me a few more IIM Calls under OBC though). At the end I

didn't attend the interview as it was on March 12th and IIFT result was announced on March 11th. Decided to give IIM-K the skip because of personal preference/reasons.

**Calls:** IIFT, IIM Kozhikode, SIBM, SCMHRD, NMIMS, IMT Ghaziabad, IIT Bombay and Delhi.

**Didn't Attend GD/PI:** IIM Kozhikode, IIT Bombay and Delhi.

**Reject:** SCMHRD

**Converts:** IIFT, SIBM, NMIMS, IMT Ghaziabad.

### **Important Lesson**

In my three years of CAT experience I have come across more than a dozen people whom have consistently and comfortably outperformed in Mock-tests but who eventually ended up getting the coveted calls. I can argue all day, that my preparation was better than theirs', but who said CAT is only about how good you are in VA or QA; It is more importantly also about presence of mind and handling of pressure.

Kindly keep a cool head, don't let your personal worries affect you during those two and half hours (I know, I am not the right person to advice on this, but hopefully someone will pick a cue from my experience). Clearing CAT definitely takes a bit of luck but most importantly you need a very cool and calm head on your shoulders.

For CAT the stakes are high, three awesome colleges (A, B, C) and three more top-ten colleges (L, I, K) are on line so the need to perform well on that particular day is amplified. The regret of not getting an IIM call - through general merit still lingers on, but it is time to move on. All the Best for future CAT takers!

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# Raghu (Surreptitious)

## Institute of Management Technology, Ghaziabad

### Class of 2008-10

So it is precisely 26th May 2008 which has turned the tide for me, something I will never forget because this is when my intense preparation for some of the most sought after B-Schools has ended or can I say finally culminated and bore fruit with only a single but formidable B-School convert. So puy's here goes a story of another engineering moron who wanted to pursue management as a post-graduate course.

I can still vividly recollect life after my second year in engineering. Unusual jargon/language began to flow around in my friends circle. "GRE" screamed one of them, "MS" the other, some of them said "M.Tech" and the newspapers said "MBA". "What the hell is going on..!" I wondered. From then on trickled down the notions of a post-graduate course. Some of my friends were already on the hunt for M.Tech in IIT's and NIT's by joining the usual coaching centres. I used to tell them or shall I say soothe them by asking whether such hardwork was required. "I need to try" said one and "My goal is that" said the other. I thought that a technical-knowledge oriented course was not my cup of tea.

I passed some days in the summer doing nothing great and due to some unusual circumstances landed myself at a coaching centre out of nowhere. "What am I doing here?" I wondered. During the one month GRE coaching I got to know about the basics of Quant and Verbal sections. I was pretty good at Quant but complex English words were something I was never used to in my previous life.

I completed reading the famous 'Norman Lewis' book which has all the fundamental words of complex English usage. Slowly I became obsessed with these words and an uncanny feeling for devouring more words took centre stage for me. I completed all words given in the institute material. So now was the time to test what I had learnt. Time to book a slot on the Internet for GRE! College reopened after summer and I was into my usual preparation of exams. I got so diverted that I never found time to write GRE, ya, you read it right! Somehow the auspicious day never arrived for me to book a slot and write GRE!

Fast forward six months and once again I find myself at the cross-roads of my career. It was December '06 and I was running out of time. I had to take a decision fast and this time I again found myself at a coaching centre, albeit a different one, for CAT. So began my chase for a B-School convert.

Fast forward another five months and mock and AIMCAT's started and from then on almost every Sunday I ended up writing a Mock or an AIMCAT. I considered an AIMCAT to be a platform for testing what I had learnt in that week. I knew that AIMCAT performances mattered because they reflect your All India standing every week.

Starting with AIMCAT 0820 I tried to improve my performance with each AIMCAT. For the first three AIMCAT's my percentiles hovered around 85-90 range. When I first crossed the 90 percentile range I felt that I had the ability in myself to do more. I was able to score consistently well in Quant and Verbal. From AIMCAT's 0820 to 0814 I scored the highest of 96.xx percentile. Then one Sunday followed an AIMCAT performance that was a quintessence of time mismanagement. I spent unusually high time on verbal section and spent very less time on DI, the section I feared the most. When I checked the AIMCAT scores I was shocked to say the least, I got a 99.xx percentile in VA which took me to heaven and when I saw my DI score I was back on earth, I scored one out of 100.

Yes, one single mark out of a hundred marks. I don't lucidly remember the AIMCAT but it was for 300 marks. I got a 42 out of 100 in verbal which fetched me 99.xx percentile and one out of 100 in DI fetched me some horrible percentile. I knew that DI was the section in which I needed to perform well if I had to do well in CAT. My scores dipped from AIMCAT 0811 to 0807 and I got a very low percentile of 68.xx in one AIMCAT. "Where am I heading?" I wondered. But I kept myself egging on. AIMCAT 0804 was conducted and I felt that I had done reasonably well after writing the paper. When I checked the key after coming out from the centre I was getting 102 out of 300. When I checked the results later that week I got 108 out of 300 and a percentile of 98.xx. During the whole CAT preparation this was the highest score I had got in any AIMCAT. But I could not keep up the same performance for the next three AIMCAT's. When I completed all my AIMCAT's I checked my AIMCAT scores again. I got a percentile of above 90 only for only 10 times out of 20.

All the while I was doing this I needed to concentrate on my semester exams so that my percentage wouldn't dip. I also prepared for campus placements and my CAT preparation slightly worked to my advantage here and I ended up with two job offers in my lap. November 18th was the D-day and from the start of November I could not concentrate on CAT because of practical and theory exams etc. which hampered my performance. The D-day finally arrived and I completed my paper and handed it over to the invigilator. I couldn't make out anything of what I had written. I started with my strongest section, Quant, but it was supposedly the toughest section of CAT 2007 paper. Then I shifted to Verbal and then to DI randomly. I wasn't able to answer a particular question when I picked it up which made me throw my strategy (that I built up during the AIMCAT's) to the winds.

I knew that accuracy was more important than attempts during the exam. With half an hour still remaining, I browsed through the



entire paper again to see if I could answer any more questions. This half an hour was the crucial time because I was able to answer four-five questions correctly and these were from different sections. My attempts were like this: Quant- ten; DI- eleven; Verbal- 12. So in a paper of 75 questions I just attempted 33 questions. "Very Low" I thought. But I knew that good accuracy could surely push me up the ladder.

One of the better things that happened to me during the last few days of CAT preparation was PaGaLGuY. When I joined PG I was literally shocked to see so many aspirants discussing each and every mock extensively. After extensive discussion of CAT 2007 paper and all permutations and combinations of scores and institute cut-off's. I was reasonably satisfied with QA but a bit apprehensive with my DI, VA scores. I thought I would end up with a score of 92. December 2007 was one hectic month because on almost all Sundays I wrote an exam.

Cometh second week of January and CAT results were announced. I didn't dare to see my scores through any other means except Internet. But one of my friends called up and said that SMS was working fine. So I typed my TR no. and sent an SMS. Result came the next instant and voila!

QA- 96.76 percentile

VA- 97.67 percentile

DI- 77.23 percentile

I was nothing short of a mixed bag of emotions. IIM Key yet again proved leading coaching centre's keys wrong and I ended up with a score of 98.21 percentile. I scored my highest in VA and that made me happy. DI yet again proved to be my nemesis.

Meanwhile a disaster performance in XAT showed up.

Got an SCMHRD call through SNAP and an NMIMS call through NMAT. Got kicked out from both the institutes at final stages and that is a different story all together! My DI score had not crossed the 80 percentile benchmark due to which I was out of reckoning for MDI and IIM-Shillong. NITIE's cut-off was 98.22 and so my hopes went for a toss. So it was either IMT-G for me or nothing. After my GD-PI for IMT-G I started to come more frequently on SB where I made some of my best friends on PG. "All is Well" I thought.

Controversy struck and I received a jolt. I do not want to raise the issue again and tell you guys as to what actually happened and who was responsible. But I would like to say Thank You to all the guys who stood by me when I wasn't there on PG

Fast Forward 2 weeks and I am back on PG. Meanwhile IMT results were announced and I found myself waitlisted. "This is the last thing I wanted" I thought. Problems compounded and the situation exacerbated when our apex court delivered its judgement on the OBC issue. So it took three waiting lists during a period of two months to see a convert for myself. So I finally saw light at the end of a tunnel!

### **Some of the key features of my preparation were:**

- Summarising the editorial columns of THE HINDU.
- Mugging up the words given on cards given by the coaching centre.
- Practising extensively problems of Quant although I left topics like Permutation and Combination which always appear Greek and Latin to me (they still do).
- Thoroughly practising VA section.

- Catching up on current affairs and writing an author's views on some particular article in my own words.
- Solving 70 percent Institute material. (70 percent constituted Key Areas)
- Practising Mock papers and reviewing my performance.

### **Some things that I have observed**

- Try to work doubly hard in your weaker sections. (Easier said than done, this is crucial if you want to make it to top-10 B-Schools!)
- Be clear why do you want to do an MBA. (Although for most of us, the primary motive is better career prospects, be prepared with an interesting answer and allot the lowest priority for placements in YOUR answer to the panel in PI.)
- Some of the toppers say that they just did smart work and some of them say that they toiled for this many hours a day. YOU are the best judge of your capabilities and you need to work accordingly.
- Don't think that CAT is the end of the road. Other exams like NMAT, IIFT, SNAP, FMS, XAT can be cracked as well. Even if you haven't cracked these you can try again next year.
- Don't get bogged down by some bad performances in AIMCATs. (AIMCAT's are a reflection of the areas in which you need to concentrate).
- Don't go into the test room with a mindset that you are going to stick to a particular strategy no matter what happens. It might not work.

The Best of All I wanted to speak about CAT - 2010 Edition

- Last but not the least **BELIEVE IN YOURSELF** that you will do well in CAT.

Let the MBA-PAGALPAN (MBA madness) prevail!

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# Vijay Bhaskar

## Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad

### Class of 2009-11

**Scored 99.88 percentile in CAT 2008**



The emotion that I attach with this thread cannot be put in words. Finally, the time has come for me to become a part of a legacy and that too with a bang! My first post will be just about my failures in the three CATs I took earlier, its only through the failures that one gets motivated to achieve success. It all started in 2004.

### **2004**

After having been placed in a MNC (I was in final year then), a friend of mine at IIT Kharagpur informed me of this discount available on mocks by T.I.M.E.. I was not interested to do an MBA at that point of time, but my friend convinced me to join the test series. I took the tests with a complete lack of seriousness and didn't even look at the papers after coming back from the test. I used to score in the range of 80-90 percentiles, not that I cared, I just took them to boost my ego. I had to go to Calcutta to take the CAT as the pattern had changed. There were 123 questions in all, with differential marking. I started with Quant and took my own sweet time there after which I went to VA, then at the end to DI. I had very

less time left for DI and screwed it on a colossal scale.

## **2005**

The final result was 95.88 percentile with Quant and VA around 96 percentile and DI 82 percentile, odd? Anyway, I forgot about CAT for a lot of time after that and started working my ass off on my B.Tech project (mostly an IT project based on Java). I tried to increase my CGPA, and managed to make it 8.42 by the end of my degree. Later joined the MNC and was put in Mainframes. I just hated Mainframes as it was very outdated but continued working so that it didn't leave a blot on my resume. Even the thought of CAT didn't cross my mind, so didn't took CAT 2005.

## **2006**

Around August, I quit IBM and I joined a mid-sized product company with primarily Telecommunication companies as clients. The work environment changed for good and was much more informal than the suffocation I faced at the MNC. This is the time I met two of my colleagues who were preparing for CAT and were taking the mocks. But still, I wasn't really "ready" for an MBA, just kept with business as usual, but was convinced by room-mates to take CAT just for the heck of it.

I remember trying to solve a very hard DI set from an AIMCAT paper with my friend the day before the exam. That was the only preparation I did. I went to exam hall and saw that QA was a piece of cake. But lack of preparation led me taking a long time, nearly an hour. Then came VA, it was the most arbit (this word is used as a slang for anything said in a negative tone) VA paper that I had ever seen. My reading speed was pathetic then and I took my own time solving the paper, but the time I spent in office reading Wikipedia articles did help me a bit, so again an hour passed. Then what was left was just half an hour for DI.

The time I came to DI, it was literally a blackout, I had not practiced a bit and everyone knows how important practice is for DI. As I had to do it fast, I wasn't actually confident of even one question. I knew that I won't be able to clear DI cut-off. The results came - Overall 96.xx, QA was 99.8x, VA was 99.3x (given that VA had been the nemesis of many, this was a welcome development) and DI was 10.xx! (I actually scored ZERO in DI). I didn't feel bad as I hadn't prepared at all, but I thought of it as a lost opportunity as QA was not going to be as easy as it was in this CAT. But then, I was getting into the "MBA mode", my work at office actually helped me in realizing the need for an MBA to boost my career.

## 2007

I was caught up with my work at office, and was recognized by everyone for my contributions. Working in a mid-sized company gave a lot of responsibility and independence to me with respect to my work. So I caught on with it, and was fairly busy all the time. The mock season came and I joined the T.I.M.E. series. But I still repeated the same mistakes that I did back in college. I didn't practice enough and did nothing apart from a quick perusal of the mock paper after coming back. My scores always used to range in the 90s (the highest it once touched was around 98 percentile). Apart from that work in the office was getting hectic. So at some point of time, I completely lost touch and that is where a downward spiral in my scores began. That led to a greater loss in confidence and I quickly started losing hope.

I clearly lacked information on those CAT crackers who had scored really less in their mocks. In short, I really missed PaGaLGuY.com, although I had an id here, I rarely used to visit, mostly to post my mock scores. CAT came and went, amidst my hectic work. I had a hard time convincing my manager for taking a leave on the Saturday before CAT. I was even thinking about my work stuff while writing CAT. My strategy was anyway screwed up. I attempted my weakest

section, DI first and was able to score averagely there. Then moved on to VA, I found it equally arbit, if not more, as 2006 and took a full hour for it. I was left with just 45 minutes for QA. Now the blackout had to happen with QA, I found it really tough after not being able to solve 2-3 questions, the pressure increased and I ended up making really bad mistakes. Anyway, result was worse than the last time - 95.xx percentile with 89.xx percentile in QA, 92.xx percentile in VA, 89.xx percentile in DI as I expected it. But I got a promotion at work and that kind of compensated for my grief of not cracking CAT.

## **2008**

After the results came for CAT 2007, I decided that CAT 2008 would be the last CAT I would be taking and that I would put in my 100 percent. Two of my room-mates made it to Ahmedabad and Calcutta and that indeed inspired me. But still, I didn't hurry it up, I was waiting for the mock season to start. I came to know about the utilities of PG through a colleague of mine. I subscribed to the QQAD mailing list and I would say that it took my Quant skills to the next level. I would strongly recommend it to anyone preparing for CAT. The questions are no doubt tougher than CAT, but once you start solving them, CAT questions just seem like cake-walk.

I also picked up previous AIMCATs and started solving various DI sets. I came to know about many tips for solving puzzle based LR questions and various patterns involved. This segregation helped me in skimming through the clutter and provided me a solid framework for handling the dreaded LR questions. It was during the same time that the PaGaLGuY.com premiere league was formed and I became part of the Bangalore DT; I saw some awesome people there. This motivated me even more to perform well in the mocks. This time I joined two series, one of CL and one of T.I.M.E.. I used to take CL mocks on Saturdays and T.I.M.E. mocks on Sundays. That made sure that I was kept busy for most of the next week.



When the mocks started, I started with a bang (99.85 percentile) partly because of the lack of prepared junta joining the mocks and partly due to the efforts that I had put in for around one month before it. I tried maintaining my percentiles about 99 trying to clear all cut-offs. The most important thing I did was to not get bogged down by an occasional low score. Such scores helped me in filling gaps and handling situations not encountered before. Plus, I made it a point to analyse each mock and solve each of the problem I had left (especially the DI sets).

I continued with QQAD and started reading lots of stuff over the Internet. I picked up some good books like *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie. The load on the work front was less than the previous year, so was able to dedicate some of my time to these activities. I thought I was all set for the BIG one (the last Mock at T.I.M.E. was indeed a confidence booster in this respect). One more good thing I did was to take leave from work starting Wednesday (CAT was on Sunday). I took some mocks during the time, and took the easiest of the lot I had preserved for myself just the day before the exam. As expected, I blasted the Mock and that gave me the required confidence. I slept early and surprisingly was able to get at least around seven hours of sleep. All set for the exam - reached exam centre about half an hour before and braced myself for the actual CAT.

Found the distribution as 160 marks for VA, 100 each for DI and QA, thought of giving more time to VA but ended up giving equal time to all three sections. Started with QA and found it easier than the last time and smoothly went along without any speed-breakers. I wanted to maximize my score through Quant so decided to persist and attempted it for full 50 minutes. Then DI, it was the toughest section in CAT 2008 and it did take a toll on me, given that DI is my weakest section. It was calculation intensive as well. Just managed to do 12 questions and hoped to get most of them correct. Started with

the verbal part of VA, found it a bit difficult, but attempted some nevertheless. Then to RCs which were a welcome development this time. The passages were easier to comprehend and there was lesser ambiguity in answer choices. This helped me gain the confidence and I did all except one RC. In the last five minutes solved some questions in another VA set. Overall, I had committed some mistakes in all sections but the damage was limited.

I started worrying about DI after the dust settled. I had got two questions wrong for sure and that put my score at 38, which turned out to be borderline case. Then began the excruciating wait for the results. But I would say that wait was worth it! Meanwhile the JMET results came and I was AIR 3. Finally, I cracked CAT, and that too with a bang. Now was the time to pass the next hurdle, the GD/PI round.

For one week after the results were announced I did nothing but party and relax, the GD/PI preparation will come, but for the time being I had to live the moment. I was at my home-town, relaxing with my cousins and family members that provided me the fuel to take a leap into the GD/PI preparations. The next week, I came to know about the CL boot-camp and braced myself for that. Now, the boot-camp is something I would recommend to any Puy thinking of converting his/her IIM Calls.

It was one hell of an experience, it went for two days and I would say I almost matched a strict B-School regimen. We did nothing but GDs, Funda gaining session, Mock PIs, General Knowledge (GK) overhaul etc. I also met some great people out there, boot-camp is something I am not going to forget for quite some time to come. I also came to know about my weaknesses (soft voice, need to have enough knowledge of my hobbies etc.) and worked towards filling the gaps. I took the T.I.M.E. material and went through the various PI experiences. This helped me a lot in getting to know the kind of questions that are normally asked. Apart from that, I used to attend

weekend GD drills at T.I.M.E.. I knew I am not a great performer in GD, all I needed was to make sure I could make two or three valid points. Ah, the next thing was academics, I made a Word document about my syllabus from my institute site and started mugging up that I started to learn some seven years earlier. It was nothing short of a rediscovery. By the time my first interview (IIM Bangalore) came, I was almost ready.

Each IIM Interview was unique in its own way. However, I liked the IIM Ahmedabad and IIM Calcutta interviews a lot. The former was more of a kind of discussion and we even discussed Hindi Grammar for some time. The latter was a stress interview, but I somehow enjoyed being massacred there.

And again came the wait for results. As the days neared I got more and more anxious. On 9th afternoon, IIM-L put up a test link and it said I was through. But then I wanted an official confirmation, and more importantly about the BIG 3 - A,B,C. At night, I came to know that I am not in the list released by Bangalore. My anxiety acquired a new dimension and I couldn't sleep the whole night. At around six, woke up knowing there is no use trying to sleep. Came to know that L had put its official link and my convert was retained there. A sigh of relief, I was heading to an IIM at least. But needed to know what happened with A,C desperately. Then came the C result - I gathered myself, entered my TR (Test Registration) No. and date of birth and then came the message - "Congratulations...." - it felt like I had attained nirvana. Waited for A result and I had converted that as well.

Now I was in a dilemma between A and C. I had to make that choice, I called up my friends and after a lot of thought, I had almost decided to head for WIMWI.

Now I have entered the world of MBA and my next concern is internship. As you see, problems in life never end, and that's what

makes it so exciting.

### **Tips for CAT Aspirants:**

i) Always keep up your confidence levels, and that doesn't mean assuring yourself that you can do it. It should come from within, it should be based on some things which you have achieved through your hard work. Fake confidence doesn't at help any time. Neither does over-confidence.

ii) Get over the “Ego” factor. If you are not able to solve a DI Puzzle Set or a QA problem amidst a test, leave it at that. You probably have the clout to solve the others. And let me assure you there is never a dearth of questions.

iii) Practice. Practice. Practice. And practice doesn't mean doing some from the basic study material. Practice means solving quality questions from previous (and recent) CAT papers, Mock CATs etc. I would advise you to get the last two years' T.I.M.E. Mock papers and try to solve each QA and DI question from them. And resort to aid, only if you are convinced that the question is beyond you. Never try to get over the “Ego” factor while practising. But make sure that you are able to solve questions of similar pattern fast if they reappear.

iv) Read. Read. Read. Read anything you can lay your hands on. It may be the newspaper (especially the editorials. Would strongly recommend 'The Hindu'), Magazines (would strongly recommend 'BusinessWorld'), Fiction (would strongly recommend books by Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Ayn Rand and Jhumpa Lahiri) and Non-Fiction (there are a hell lot of topics you can pick from, including Philosophy). Apart from that, somewhat lesser fun is to solve the RCs from previous CATs/Mock CATs.

v) Follow PG regularly, but not to the extent that it turns out to be an addiction. Subscribe to mailing lists like QQAD (Quant Question A

Day) and DI question a day. Keep updating your mock scores in the thread meant for it and keep assuring yourself. If possible, do track what actually went wrong with a specific mock, so that you can fill in the gaps.

vi) CAT is not the end of the world. Allocate a good quantity of your time to your regular activities (academics, if you are studying and work, if your working). Note that a good percentage in graduation is the requirement of any good college so don't spoil your chances by spoiling your grades. CAT will come many times, but a bad GPA/percentage in your college is going to haunt your profile forever.

### **Summarily,**

CAT 2004, 2006, 2007: All messed up (95-96 percentiles)

CAT 2008 score,

Overall 99.88

QA:99.83

DI:95.86

VA:98.7

JMET 2009 rank: All Indian Rank 3

Calls: BLACKI, SJM SOM

Converts: LACKI, SJMSOM

Rejects: B

Joined: IIM Ahmedabad.

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# Himanshu Nigam

## Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode

### Class of 2008-10

**Scored 99.29 percentile in CAT 2007.**



I've read through this forum many a times and this post is not an attempt at an inspiring story like most of them, but just a fulfillment of a promise I had made to myself while reading the posts here during my preparations, that one day, I will post here and I am happy I am doing it after Abhishek's post, one of the best friends I have made during my preparations.

#### **2004 (The Background)**

Predictably, my story starts with the Engineering entrance exams as well. I had been just an above average student all through my school life, my interested always in sports and not studies. But as is the case with lakhs of students across India I too gave up everything else and started preparing for the mother of all exams 'IITJEE.'

Class eleventh and twelfth were hell for me, finally ended up with an AIEEE rank of 65000 plus, forget IIT. Decided (again, as thousands in India do) to drop a year for IIT, not thinking that I wasn't as academically brilliant as the students who actually crack this exam. Worked as hard as it was possible but ended with an AIEEE rank of 54000 plus. Got into a college called **JIIT**, in Noida, about which

Prepared exclusively for Anupam Shrivastava

even I hadn't heard of. That was probably the last time that I've actually cried in my life. My parents had never ever put any pressure on me to study all through school, but the disappointment on their faces was evident. Maybe it was because of the pressure, I used to choke at crunch time but at that time I knew that I had done all that I could and it still wasn't good enough.

## **Jan 2007 (why MBA?)**

Soon I had forgotten it all in two and a half years of college life. Sports and Gaming had taken over. In my third year, my closest friend, who had gone to NIT Hamirpur and was a year ahead of me, took CAT-06 and got 97.36 percentile (eventually got into HR at MDI). That was the first time I heard of CAT. I had heard of the IIMs, my dad is from FMS. XLRI and IMT finished the list of colleges that I knew about.

Found out that almost the entire batch at my college was preparing for CAT and most had already joined coaching classes. But companies were about to come to campus and my first preference was a job. Infosys was the first at our campus and the previous year they had changed their test pattern to something closer to CAT. That started my preparation. Took up my roommate's IMS Testing Resources package and finished basic Quant and DI in about a month along with all the puzzle books available in the market. Though this kind of preparation wasn't needed for IT companies it ensured that I blasted the papers of all the companies that came to college. I took up three companies finally by the end of the semester. But what was important was that it gave me the much needed confidence to think about CAT.

I decided to give up gaming altogether (it is a sacrifice if it is something one does for ten plus hours a day) borrowed packages from friends to start preparing. I didn't have the courage to ask my father for Rs. 25,000 bucks for the coaching even though money

didn't matter. I also had absolutely no confidence on coaching centres after the JEE fiasco. My friend had joined a one and half month crash course from T.I.M.E. and I had decided that I would join it if I felt like preparing in June. Spent that semester till May sporadically solving maths from packages of Career Launcher as I knew that I was weak in it.

## **June 2007**

After the semester got over I decided to go ahead with my preparations and join the course in T.I.M.E. as I had absolutely no idea about the exam apart from what is asked in it. I remember going straight to the T.I.M.E. office on a Saturday with the Rs. 14,000 fee in hand. The lady at the office asked me about the colleges and I got only Calcutta correct out of all the IIMs (other answers included Allahabad and Bombay). She smilingly enrolled me and told me about a test the next day. Went to take it and immediately the familiar feeling of crowds at entrance exams returned.

That was the last Sunday of May and the test was AIMCAT0820. I started from left to right in linear order and left the entire last section. Got 95.9 percentile in that test, which made me think “Hang on, I can actually do this”. Also got a Rs. 3000 scholarship from T.I.M.E., which I used to enroll for CL's test series.

Classes started in the first week of June and were held five days a week for four hours a day (for six weeks). There were just 15 students in the class but there was such a shortage of time that things were taught at the speed of light. Moreover nobody had the time to discuss AIMCATs. My percentiles ranged from 89-93 odd in the next three AIMCATs and I still treated sectionals as an extra statistic on the T.I.M.E. site.



## **PG.com**

One day I heard the word 'pagalguy' uttered by one of the teachers in class in response to a question posed by a student from the site and I thought “what a weird name for a site”. I was idling around at home that day so visited the site and eventually reached the threads for AIMCATS. I couldn't shut my mouth for the first ten minutes. First, I found out about something known as sectional cut-offs, but more importantly, I saw guys here who were scoring 99 plus in each paper. Somehow “seeing” such people in person brought me down to earth. Since I had no peer group to study with, being at home most of the time, people like MFI, JLT, Basilisk, Anirban, Rohan, Prashant and many many others here became the group I compared my marks against. At first it was very frustrating, I used to tear my hair apart thinking that these guys are here only to show-off. But soon I saw how hard they worked to achieve the high standards they had set for themselves and how they helped others like me on the threads. Seeing the strategies and ways of attempting the AIMCATs of guys from the UDT and DT teams helped me the most. I never had the guts to post my weak scores though.

I had found out early enough that VA was my strength. Many years of reading had ensured that I was good at it. But more importantly I had an extremely fast reading speed. As expected I had two weak sections. So I used to bunk English classes to keep up with the pace of study (not that it helped). The only good thing I did in that period was that I used to solve the entire Quant chapter from the package which was going to be taught the next day even if it meant being awake for the entire night. This was a mistake I had made during the engineering days which I wanted to make sure I didn't repeat. This made me better than the other fourteen students in the class and also gave me some confidence in my weaker section.

The All India open mock CAT 0816 was on the same day as the first CL mock CAT. That was the first time I crossed 97 in an AIMCAT.

My classes got over, I left the hostel and came home to prepare for the next semester.

## **August 2007**

Had to study almost all the course by myself as chapters such as number systems had been taught in class two, but in those one and half months of classes I had got an idea about CAT which I didn't have before. The numerous threads at PG (and totalgadha) helped, most of all the concepts thread from which I learned the entire number systems from maximus.

By 0809 I had scored above 98 twice with my other scores hovering around 82 to 94 odd. I had never been able to clear both Quant and DI in a single AIMCAT but at least my strategy was set, DI-VA-QA. Even this I had decided upon after reading Basilisk's strategy.

DI of AIMCATs gave me nightmares (CL was a tad easier for me) I was able to do better in Career Launcher's mockcats, partly because of lesser competition.

I had managed to clear Quant's cutoff (albeit by a small margin) three to four times. I was only good at geometry and my question selection was usually good, giving me a 90-100percent accuracy in most papers, but the attempts were never enough.

VA was the only section that kept my percentiles up. I was able to attempt all the questions (if less than 40) in 50 minutes and never needed to study anything for it, and usually scored 98 plus in it.

The most important thing I did during that period was that I managed to find AIMCAT of previous years and started taking Quant and DI as sectional tests. To compare my performances with someone I opened up the AIMCAT threads of last year and compared with their posts.

This improved my Quant and DI greatly along with fine tuning my strategies and question selection, but what was to prove decisive on the final day were the DS questions which were ever present in the 2007 AIMCAT series and rarely in the 2008 ones. I had never posted in all this time on the threads as I felt my scores weren't up to it. But after reading a post by buck\_was, I started posting.

## **October 2007**

One day I was called for a counseling session by T.I.M.E., which included all the toppers where I was told that I actually had a chance of getting a good score in CAT. Before that, I had never thought seriously about cracking CAT. My focus used to be from AIMCAT to AIMCAT, always trying to improve my performance there instead of thinking about November.

There were also two guys who were counseled with me, both from Delhi College of Engineering (DCE), both of whom suffered from the problem that they used to get nervous during the paper. By that time I had gotten over this problem in me completely and saw firsthand what I had read countless times on PG that how cool you are on the final day matters a lot. Watching these two toppers tense at exams made me decide that no matter what, this time I am not going to make the same mistake I made in my engineering exams. I am not going to crack or buckle under pressure.

Slowly as my Quant course finished, with practice, I was able to cross 97 percentile four times in the last eight AIMCATs, my average was always between 92-94 (last 2 AIMCATs were 93 and 91 odd). I had cleared all three sectionals only once and had never made to the toppers' list (though I had managed it a few times in CL). But I always had the same thought in my mind, that this is only my first attempt, I can take CAT again, no one expects anything from me and I am going to turn my weakness into my strength and be as cool

on the final day as possible. The maximum I hoped for was a 98 percentile so I could get calls from MDI and NITIE.

## **November 2007**

I had heard a lot about “burning out” at PG, so had decided not to study in November come what may. I had attended college just enough to maintain my attendance to a bare minimum so decided to go there for two weeks. Celebrated my birthday by playing counter-strike for two whole weeks. One thing that I used to continually think about those days was whether to continue to do DI as my first section. Since DI is a case of nerves (my personal opinion) I was apprehensive about what would happen on D-day. Finally decided to face it head-on and keep the same strategy of DI-VA-QA. Came back home for the last 2-3 days, revised formulas and slept for a whole day before CAT.

## **November 18**

I reached the exam center early, and the tensed faces there removed what little nervousness I had. On seeing the same pattern of 75 questions I broke into a smile as I had an inkling of what was coming next.

Started with DI, but everything was different from AIMCATS, and I soon realised that the logic was very easy in the sets. Changed my set strategy of attempting sets completely to solving a chosen few questions (ones with smaller calculations) from many sets, but wasted 1-2 minutes on the wrong question. After 50 minutes I knew I hadn't done very well as my calculation speed had always been slow, but at least it hadn't been as monstrous as the AIMCATs and I had been able to solve all the DS questions.

Moved on to VA, and it again looked like alien territory. With five RCs, my strategy of attempting the entire section went out of the

window, and it somehow seemed even more ambiguous than the AIMCATs. I decided to do something which I hadn't done in any paper. Gave VA only 45 mins and attempted 20 questions, hoping that I would still be able to clear VA and 55 minutes in Quant would help me clear it.

Again, got a big shock, with geometry having only one question. But still attempted carefully thinking that a high accuracy in 55 minutes will help me clear the cut-offs.

Came out blank, had no idea how I had done. Everything depended on how fast others had managed to do their calculations in DI, my accuracy in Quant, and of course, the VA keys. (I never used to have a track of how many I was attempting in Quant and DI).

Soon found out that the only section in which I had definitely done well was my weakest section- DI, getting 50. I did not do well in VA according to the keys, getting about 25. Ten marks hung in the balance in Quant and I wasn't sure about an answer I had marked. Removing those 10 marks and that answer, I was getting 27 (which could go up to 42).

The entire next month went in speculation of cut-offs, VA answers, and Quant questions as the IIMs had managed to make even that ambiguous. I knew I was on the border of 98 percentile getting about 102 but I personally thought at that time that more number of test takers this year would mean cut-offs going higher than the previous year.

On the day of the results, I was in the hostel and got a call from my Dad (from whom I had carefully hidden the fact that results were going to be declared that day). He had found out about the results and they were,

QA - 32 (95.60 percent)

VA - 35 (98.23 percent)  
DI - 50 (97.41 percent)  
Overall -117 (99.26 percent)

Jumping with joy was an understatement at that time. On checking the website I had calls from C, I and K. Other factors making it sure that I didn't get a call from L and B. I missed A by 0.04 percentile. I was a little disappointed, thinking that I might never again get a shot at A, but was still happy and intent on trying to convert the calls I had.

### **The Group Discussion and Personal Interview Adventures**

I enrolled in T.I.M.E. again, and soon the feeling of joy disappeared. I had no problems with speaking, but there was no content whatsoever. My general knowledge was pathetically weak (near zeros in IIFT and SNAP testament to the fact) and I had never seen a newspaper beyond the sports page.

I put in a lot of hard work, reading a year full of subscriptions of magazines, spending hours on Wikipedia, studying subjects which I hadn't looked at during engineering, and watching CNN during whatever free time I could get (even had to sacrifice my near-shoulder length hair). Attending some mock GD's helped iron out flaws (my habitual bunking disorder didn't help) and I was ready for my interviews.

The GD and interviews were really fun. I had a great time and by the end of them I was satisfied (which was also because I was never grilled much on academics) with whatever I had managed. The rest was left to the professors.

After much delay, results came yesterday. First got a boot from C in the morning, and then, after what seemed like the longest wait of my life, got into K.

Never really thought about going to an IIM ever, didn't jump for joy and dance around this time and it still hasn't sunk in yet.

All I want to say about CAT is that it gave me a second chance to prove myself and with some luck on my side I've managed to do a bit of that. I really enjoyed the last year, made lots of new friends, and have found out more about myself than in the previous twenty. I just want to thank everyone here at PG who have prepared alongside me this year, even though I was an almost invisible participant, I've read almost each and every post. You all have helped me more than you guys know, and for someone preparing almost entirely on his own, PG was the only support I had.

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# Sumit Bedi

## Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore

### Class of 2008-10

**Scored 99.90 percentile in CAT 2007**



Today is a big day for me (some of you already know while the rest will soon know why) and finally I feel right to put my story here right up with the legendary ones which we have been reading since last year and getting inspired.

Well, for me it began towards the end of semester one i.e. around Nov. 2002. My parents had moved to Bhopal from Chandigarh and I had joined the hostel in September, I would call this phase of my life – ‘Getting Introspective’, all along my schooling I had never bothered to know where am I headed or what kind of a man I’ll be, but just a few months away from my parents and I started thinking a lot on these lines. I was like a blank slate which was ready for its script and I didn’t know what would it be! A week before my semester exams, I decided to go to Bhopal and come back a day before the exams were scheduled to start, after this small break, I had decided that I had to start with a few things and these efforts were focused mainly on my communication skills (public speaking, vocabulary etc). Now, a few incidents during my first semester had put this thought in my mind that Electronics engineering was not my cup of tea and I’m proud to say that I concluded this after putting in a good effort (though not well-directed).

Prepared exclusively for Anupam Shrivastava



And next thing I remember was that academics weren't getting much of my time; all that I would think of, involved words, editorials, music, fiction, extra-curricular events and that's the very same period when 'management' as a field appealed to me! My brother had sent me the 'B-School Survey' book (the one that comes yearly, it was worth 195 bucks then) with all the information on the Indian B-schools especially the IIMs, it was a great insight into what MBA is about and truly speaking that book inspires me till this day. Moreover, we were a bunch of friends and who shared my enthusiasm towards management as well. So one fine Sunday morning four of us were sitting at Ekadiken (a small coaching institute in Chandigarh) giving our first mock CAT!

And guess what, I got a mail (snail) from them offering a scholarship of five thousand, it was a colored paper in the format of a cheque, that had my name in bold, right on top of it and said this aloud to me - 'Dude, you can do it!'

Next phase of my life had arrived, named - 'Getting active' and this went on till the end of sixth semester, after all that introspection and efforts, I was out to get the taste of the real stuff, got into a lot of extra-curricular activities, was involved in the organization of a few intra-college and inter-school events and was elected the General Secretary of the placements committee in my college as well. I cherish this period because of a high rate of growth in the graph of my learning curve, all along the day I would be making plans, or structuring some idea, got infamous for reading 'The Hindu' on the last benches of lecture halls. Managing above 70 percent was the target for second year but, as time passed by the target was revised to 65 percent, this phase ended with me getting a campus placement in CSC on July 4, 2005.

It was all hunky dory till then, I thought I knew life and had experienced a lot. But alas! Life had more lessons to teach me, a few days and incidents later, I had resigned from the placements

committee, got bored with extra-curricular activities, life around me was meaningless while people, seemingly cynical, got sick frequently too. I wished I had passed out of the college at the end of my third year and got a scholarship at Bull's Eye Chandigarh for the one year preparation course but, the zeal waned away after a few classes as I had never taken tuition and more importantly, as I don't agree with their methodology and ideology for preparation, so no more classes or preparation as well. Bought a laptop, got into stocks for a brief span but mostly just lazed around for days without even attending the college, watching and analysing movies, their characters, so this phase of my life should be rightly called – 'Getting complacent and dormant' and in hindsight, I think that since I was way too involved with various activities earlier, I got into a mindset where I felt the need to rediscover myself!

Anyway, this was the time when CAT was approaching, test series had commenced and people were gearing up, one of my friends showed me a pamphlet from PT offering a series of ten tests for some 1000 bucks, sounded like a good deal, started with a 92 percentile, then worked on my Quant a bit and things improved, decided to start the paper with Quant as then I was able to handle it well. I landed up mostly in the 97-98 percentile region, though I worked a bit on my Quant member analysing a mock paper in depth and the biggest problem of all, I didn't take a single two hour test at my place, so had a huge issue of concentrating for two hours at a stretch, but the good part was, I was gearing up and then on October 16, 2005 in PracCAT 6, I got AIR 65.

Unlike all the DT and toru (slang for intelligent and extra ordinary) people, who are consistently good, I have always believed in rising to the occasion and managing 'Just in Time' and this high rank was uncalled for as after that score, complacency set in and I didn't do much thereafter, didn't take a test as I was afraid that I'll spoil that feel-good of the top 100 rank that I had got (though only once).

## **November 20 – CAT 2005**

Neither did I have any sort of predetermined mindset here which I guess comes only when you have a history of performing well in mocks nor was I in the ‘main to aise hi dene aya hu’ (I am taking the test just for the sake of it) mode as I had a long association with CAT and knew that it’s basically aptitude and attitude, all I told myself was – ‘let’s see’!

CAT 2003 had 150 questions; CAT 2004 had 123 and continuing with the trend of reduction in number of questions CAT 2005 had only 90 questions. While we had the papers in front of us waiting for the bell to ring, I calculated that it should be  $10 \times 1$  and  $20 \times 2$  for each section, made a rough strategy and started the paper, first took up quant - 42 minutes – attempt: 21 marks, then analyzed the verbal section and did four two markers in eight minutes and moved to DI, started with that ‘Olympics venue election’ set- had read about it in news so thought I’ll be able to do it, ten minutes invested but, result – ZILCH! (Mistake 1). Decided to move away, in next 30 minutes, made attempts worth 21 marks and then I was exhausted (Mistake 2). In next half hour, my skills in verbal ability were found wanting along with a lack in concentration and I ended up with a total of 21 attempts in VA as well.

I came out of the hall, thinking that the paper was a bit tough than last time and since last year cut-off was 51 this time it should be around 45, next, I met my friend, and he asked me about it, I told him QA 21 – he said with your accuracy –it’s superb, then I said DI 21 – he said awesome and then the moment I uttered VA 21 attempts- I could see it in his eyes, he himself had made attempts worth 48 marks in VA and was amazed that how could I do such a foolish thing.

Well, same evening, solutions started to pour in from CL and the others, first thing I heard was, the VA Bond of my batch was getting three marks then came my turn to face it and it totaled up to five

marks! Called up the VA Bond and shared a good laugh about it, we both knew that it was over for us this year but were sure that the realization of our dream had only been delayed, not finished by any means, next, it was a relaxed December at home and then XAT was coming near!

## **January 8 – XAT 2006**

I was totally relaxed and didn't even care to know what kind of paper was XAT. Anyway, the pattern was new, made close to 60 attempts with just 9 in quant, thought that it would be enough for a 90 percentile and I was right I got 98.64 overall with 91.8 in quant but where I went wrong was that cut-offs in XAT weren't 90!

The results were out on Jan 30 and I thought I should get a call but, Jan 31 confirmed that management education had to wait for two more years to embrace me. Quant cut-off for BM was 92.3 percentile! (And this was the time when I viewed a few threads at PagalGuy and got introduced to this forum thing, didn't make an ID though)

A very interesting realization that I believe most aspirants of management education would have had is, the significant role of these experiences during preparation, mocks, exams results in shaping you up as a person! For me all this happened in my phase of personal struggle and thus, had a great importance attached to it.

## **CAT 2005 results**

QA – 98.2

DI – 97.8

VA – 65

Overall – 96.38

**June 1, 2006** – My parents moved to Mumbai.

**June 19, 2006** – I joined CSC at Noida where I had a bond period of two years.

I knew that I hadn't done justice to my engineering studies, so through this job I sought to make amends and do something technical but, Alas! It was not to be, after getting inside the industry I got to know that there are product based companies and services based companies. Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC) is an IT services one, anyway, got the hang of the support work and though it wasn't very technical, I started to look at the bright side, I wasn't a computer science Engineer or a techie freak who wanted the best work for himself, this profile helped me realize my strengths in communication skills and exercise my faith in team-work as well, got the 'team-player of the quarter' award within six months of joining, won a logo competition for my project and was also referred by my manager for the interview with a team from Business Today for the 'BT- best places to work in India' survey (though I completely forgot about it and was chatting in café while my manager's eyes were hunting for me).

This phase was great fun and had many firsts attached to it, the anxious first day at job, the exciting first salary that was supposed to make all our dreams come true, our first self-rented house etc, heard about CAT 2006 as well, read a lot about the luck factor in VA and far easier QA in it supposedly to take in more non-Engineers!

After reading that entire stuff one thing was sure – CAT was going GMAT way and that meant a very different type of verbal section than we had seen earlier, especially RCs. Anyway, January and February registered the peak in my input towards my job and then in March I started to plan for higher studies, that zeal to do something technical had revived within me and along with a friend of mine, my thoughts wandered in the direction of MS in the USA, to give our

plans some impetus, we took the exam dates for September. Next, began all that scanning through the word lists of Baron's and thus, excess beauty had become 'supererogatory pulchritude' for us, for the next few months at least!

Though the preparation was getting along nicely, I hadn't zeroed on any particular course, I was inclined towards graphics but thought that I should get into it only if I were to get a good exposure of what it was all about, so the approach was to explore the fundas (logic) behind this field and then try to do something in practice which would help me in not only understanding and applying the subject but also in making a strong case for me later in my application for the relevant course. But, as you can see, everything doesn't go according to your plans! I could not extract enough zeal from within to go all out for MS in graphics, Engineering was surely not for me! So what was?

I put number of hours searching for courses in US that accepted GRE score, I loved the preparation and was doing well in the practice exams (1400-1550) and so I thought, 'can this score be used for a course in any other field?' Then my mind wandered to what I had always thought as an interesting and possible career option for me - Marketing Research and to my surprise I was able to find four MS courses in top 100 US universities for Market Research and other related fields and suddenly I smelled an opportunity. Queried, googled, read a lot about these courses, the rankings of the universities and also the inevitable question - MS vs MBA!

The four universities where this MS course was offered, were not in top 20 and MS was not meant to prepare you for a job as MBA is and thus, it was simple for me now. If all I wanted was to get into management education then MBA should be it and then the next part was easy too, I wanted to get into an Indian B-School- GMAT was not an option because of the financial factors and a few other reservations, I took a leave from office and was off to Mumbai for

around ten days, got back on June 19, the day I completed one year as an IT Engineer.

I had made up my mind and on the blessed day of June 26, had made a PG ID too! Was reading 'The World is Flat' those days and got introduced to a new term 'LAYF' coined by Bill Gates, decided to use it as my name here! My initial month was mostly spent in verbal preparation section, Para jumbles, RCs, SCs and the best, the vocab thread, found people like Vyomb who were updating the threads very sincerely with questions and answers as well! Posted about my profile and approach on the CAT preparation thread for working junta (people) and got my first reply from none other than - 'Greenspan' he had very encouraging words for me and told me to hop in to the CAT journey! And I followed!

I appeared for the All-India free mocks for PT and T.I.M.E. in August, got AIR 85 in the PT one with a pathetic score of 65 which confirmed that not many people were taking it even when was offered for free, screwed up in the T.I.M.E. mock with 55 minutes spent on QA and a net score of 3!

And then the best thing happened to me - minkuvg (VG from UDT), 2 months (Jayant - not very active on PG) and me joined hands! VG was taking the T.I.M.E. series from the beginning and was doing good while me and Jayant decided to stay away from the mocks for at least a few weeks more, to work on our skill-set first and then if this wasn't enough, in the beginning of September I was blessed with BBLT!

This was a great experience - Tanveer, Deep, Hameed, mohit1984, ankit\_insane, fringant, obsessed\_bout\_mba, buck\_was, jimmygoogle, chakde, Pawanpadekal, Vineet.nitd, made\_for\_iims - can't thank these guys enough. We poured our hearts out in the thread, pushed each other to do well despite all those disastrous mock after mock, even the non-members had found a new home - marijuana\_user,

ameya\_ahr, with wonderful words flowing out in the thread and for this very reason, I think it was the best thread of last year!

Apart from this online life, minkuvg, me and Jayant were zeroing in on our weaknesses as well, we talked a lot about the exam, the thinking that went into making it, what would click for each of us and what would fail us. While my dread for Quant and comfort in VA was shared equally by Jayant which showed in our T.I.M.E. mocks, minkuvg was giving rocking 99 plus performances and then we took two good decisions: one to take mocks from CL, IMS etc and second, to work on our concentration levels which we were sure was going to be a huge factor in a 150 minutes long exam.

It was October the thirteenth and we decided to take two mocks back to back on our own. Even though, one can be confident of his/her ability, that satisfaction of giving good results adds zing to your prep and that's what these two mocks did to me, we sat there for continuous five hours and when I got the cut-offs from the PG threads, I had scored a 99 plus in both of them with Quant being the weaker section, the very next day, in mock all India SNAP I got AIR 55 which sparked further my journey for continuous improvement. I experimented a lot to know what clicked for me, two mocks on Saturday - T.I.M.E. mocks on Sunday - then one CL/IMS one on Thursday and things were looking good. I was getting 99 plus regularly at my place but in the T.I.M.E. Sunday mocks, things were stuck between 92-96 with an occasional 82 as well, so I knew I had to take give away the comfort of sitting at my place and take the tests at TIME's test centre now.

As I had managed Quant two years back, this time too I left this section for later, decided to try two-round strategy with first period of 30 minutes to tap in on six-seven sitters to make sure I was close to cut-off and also to mark three to five doable questions for the second round of 15-20 minutes, after a few mocks, this was fine-tuned and was working out great for me!



One more lesson was not to leave DI for last as it had been disastrous for me earlier. So through those 15 odd mocks, I had attained a good understanding of my strengths and weaknesses, now was the time for the final lap with less than 50 days to go for the exam. Greenspan wrote a superb post on how to utilise the month of October in our preparation and we had quite a few yahoo conferences as well. Took three mocks towards the end of October and since DI was bothering me, worked on the problems and finalised two-three strategies to take into the last 15 days, left for Mumbai on 7th November and decided to take five mocks in the next five days.

This ensured that the change of environment didn't spoil my groove that I had got into after months of preparation, things were looking good, be it PT, CL, IMS, T.I.M.E. and whatever pattern, I had achieved consistency in my results which were around 98 percentile at worst and 99.3 at best, so, I should get MDI on my worst day and IIM Lucknow on my best - this is what I would tell myself, then in the final four days, just picked up the 25 odd mocks that I had taken, analysed them while scanning the earlier CAT papers as well and next up was November 18, the C-day as we used to call it!

Was sent to bed by mum-dad at 2200 hours and you know, you can not sleep that early when it's C-1 day! Was thinking all sort of things and amidst all that - I had the urge to tell myself - "let's start with DI tomorrow" with the sane part of my mind, intact with all these anxieties, telling me to take it as it comes I was reminded of one of my posts at BBLT where I had mentioned that the ones who had made it through in the previous years were the ones who had applied themselves well during the exam, who had used their presence of mind to use their instincts in order to maximise the results! As we saw last night in the Champions League final, even the top scorer in English football choked while taking the penalty against Cech and froze in front of the goal.

## **November 18 - CAT 2007**

The pattern hadn't changed, so I assumed that the content of the exam had the so-called surprise that we expected from CAT year after year. One scan, and I was proved right, verbal had short RC's with three questions each along with seemingly vocabulary based questions and DI had no signs of reasoning in it! Followed my gut-feel, started with DI and after 30 minutes had done nine questions, slow and steady, making sure the calculations were exact, thought about shifting but decided to carry on in order to continue with the momentum as this seemed a good opportunity to bag a good score in DI, 50 minutes and I had attempted 14 questions, was satisfied so far. Next up, first round of QA, 30 minutes and did seven questions, used short-cuts and jugaads here a lot, so wasn't sure if I had done well.

Then, made foray into VA and 25 minutes in, I had done three Vocab, four PJ and three Paragraph Completion questions. RC's looked confusing and Sentence Correction had me in awe and panic button was about to be pressed but then decided to take a break here and fill up the ovals to relax a bit. Then, with renewed confidence just stared at those Sentence Correction questions in the eye and cracked them in a few minutes, then did the RC's and made an attempt of 21 in VA with only ten minutes left.

Approached QA again for the second round after holding myself from attempting the third question of a RC as it would have affected my balance in score. 96 plus in both QA and VA is much better than 99 plus in VA but 90 in QA! Did two more questions with double cross checking of my answers and was on my way to the third one when the bell rang! I had to calculate X-Y; had calculated Y but no X yet so made a guess and submitted the answer sheet. Came back to find the X in fifteen seconds and also that I had marked a wrong answer! So ten attempts in QA and one was surely wrong!

## **My first thoughts**

I had the feeling that the last guess in QA was the only wrong that I had made in the stipulated time and would manage a good DI and VA score, but QA? This had me worried. I could get 35, I had the practice of guessing the over all cut-offs after the mocks and since I always scored around it, my guesses were close more often than not and CAT 2007 seemed to me a paper with possible cut-off in the region of 115.

Later in the evening was surprised to see Directors from the coaching institutes coming out with expected cut-offs of around 95-100 and then, the solutions poured in!

DI -  $14/14 = 56$  marks

VA - from various keys it was between 34-54

QA -  $9/1 = 35$  with sectional cut-off expected to be around 25

and I punched the air with joy!

## **January 8, 2008**

CAT results were out!

DI - 56 - 98.97 percentile

QA - 35 - 96.76 percentile

VA - 54 - 99.93 percentile

Overall - 99.90 with all six calls!

## **May 1, 2008**

Converts - CLIK

Waitlist - B (#35)

Reject - A

Today, on May 22, at 1610 hours Mr. Bhaskar Rao from IIM Bangalore admission office called up at my place and informed that my waitlist had cleared!

And so with that, finally my season came to an end with me landing up in my dream business school!

Thank you PaGaLGuY and thank you all for reading through my dastaan-e-CAT. (Story of CAT)

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# Niranjan Prabhakar

## XLRI School of Business and Human Resources, Jamshedpur Class of 2007-09

**Scored 99.65 percentile in XAT 2006.**



One more mammoth post from an UnderDog! Hope it makes sense!

### **July 2003**

July 2003 bole toh fultoos bindaas life! (I mean total carefree life) Bole toh(I mean) got a job on the third day of seventh semester, in the fourth company coming in the college (NIT Calicut)! No classes due to the placements and no tension in life! Daily life used to be playing games (computer/outdoor), watching movies or more important, helping batch-mates in their interviews or going to their parties if they get through!

For the first time I saw people studying for CAT! T.I.M.E. had organised a special batch for my college and some people had joined it. Unke saat humne bhi CAT ka form bhar diya! 1100 bucks ka sawal tha, babu nae bola ja jele apni zindagi (I too filled up the CAT form with them. It was just a matter of Rs. 1,100, Dad said, “Son, go live your life.”)

Had never heard about any site called PaGaLGuY.

### **November 2003**

No tension! Junta from NIT Suratkal had landed up the previous night (centre was Calicut), lots of boozing and stuff went on in the campus all night. Early morning took the paper, wapas hostel aye toh malum pada paper cancelled! (When I came back to the hostel, I found out that the paper had been cancelled)A few of us were, “what the f\*\*k!!!”, the majority (including me ) were: Ye ye Ye! 1100 mae do baar CAT dene ka chance! (Ye ye ye, two chances to take the CAT with the same amount of money!)

Still hadn't heard about PaGaLGuY.com

### **February 2004**

Again no tension! Got up early morning, took the CAT again. Never bothered to check the result till the score card came. Got around 88 percentile! Had to give a party because I was the top scorer on the floor.

Still hadn't heard about PaGaLGuY.com

### **September 2004**

Decided to give CAT a rest for this year, busy in software work and trekking!

Still hadn't heard about PaGaLGuY.com

### **May 2005**

Got together with a bunch of guys in my project who were serious about CAT and preparation. Joined CL full time classes, worked on

it full steam! We were part of a group of work-ex people who had weekend classes, but we enrolled for late night weekday classes in addition to it! (Thanks to two wonderful CL faculty: Chandra Sir and Ankur Sir - they sat with us every night!) Apart from the weekend classes, every day evening, it used to go from 8 to beyond 11, from May end to October! Those were the good old days!

Finally got to know about PaGaLGuY and joined as soon as possible (asap).

## **November 2005**

D-Day! Got completely nervous due to the new format of the CAT paper. Could manage a feeble 90 percentile and since had applied to only the top 10-15 odd colleges so, no calls. Also made the big mistake of ignoring other MBA exams (SNAP/JMET/IIFT). Finally MBA 04 gave me a TISS and SPJain Dubai call, both which I couldn't convert.

This was a hopeless period for me, I had completely spoiled my work profile, as I had made it very clear that I was interested in an MBA. I had prepared like hell, the likes of which I could never replicate. Gave a few company interviews, but never felt the interest. MBA was in my blood. Decided to give it a shot again.

## **March-April 2006**

Decided to start prep early enough. Also had new roomies who were taking CAT for the first time (Newbies); introduced them to the world of PG! Joined the mock series of T.I.M.E.; also formed the famous **ninja\_talli-pankay82-Roman2005-kapil\_b** cubicle in my office (Being a bunch of core MBA-takers in the same cubicle, we used to openly discuss zillion Quant/DI/English questions in between work; be it questions from QQAD/DQAD/QuantMarathon/DI Marathon/Geometry/Para jumbles etc

threads, we discussed/shouted/quarreled/solved it among ourselves!) It was a sight for sore eyes! If one of us was on leave, he used to continue from home through SMS-es and phone calls!

## **November 2006**

D-Day! This time CAT was a breeze, thought I had done quite well; later on I found out that people had done even better! Again managed an average 93 percentile. Later on took IIFT/SNAP/JMET/XLRI/FMS as they came by; scored a decent 530 rank in JMET, a pretty good 90 marks in SNAP and an exhilarating 99.65 percentile in XAT!

Took the Symbiosis (SIBM/SCMHRD) college interviews, and the XLRI interviews, finally was wait listed on both the XLRI calls with a decent chance of converting one of them.

## **Finally Converted both of them, went for the BM course.**

I learnt quite a few lessons from the two odd years of MBA preparation.

- CAT is not about proving that you are the best.  
CAT is about showing that you can give even the best person a good run for his money.
- CAT is not about determining where you exactly stand among the thousands who try for the same few odd management seats.
- CAT is about ignoring those thousands of people and instead fighting against yourself to improve yourself.
- CAT is not about waiting for a chance to show your skills.  
CAT is about grabbing the chance whenever you get it.



- The best person is never going to be decided through CAT; do not keep CAT as your only option in life; there IS life beyond CAT.
- CAT gives you an opportunity; one out of many to go a step further. If you are not able to step up this time, look for alternatives. Never get disheartened. Keep options open.

Amen.

Niranjana Prabhakar  
XLRI, Jamshedpur  
2007-2009

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# **Soham Bandopadhyay**

## **Indian Institute of Management. Calcutta**

### **Class of 2008-10**

**Scored 96.35 percentile in CAT 2007.**

Finally I get to post on the thread I always wanted to. Finally, after more than three years of visiting PaGalGuY.com, I get to post on the most sacred thread of all.

Well, here's my story.

I was never an ambitious guy. Growing up in a small town like Bareilly, I used to think that I would never be able to compete with the big-town boys.

This feeling was further reinforced when I got a rank of 16,500 in the IIT-JEE screening and was consequently not able to sit for the main examination.

I finally got admission into Manipal Engineering College and was happily whiling away my time till the sixth semester. When the results of my fifth semester exams came, I had scored a GPA of 1.72 out of 4.0. Though expected, I had never imagined that I would not even be able to cross the minimum pass GPA (2.0). However, since I had scored better in my previous exams, I was able to scrape through due to the cumulative GPA effect.

But back home, my parents were really disappointed. There were five other students in my college from my township and all of them had scored more than 3.3 in the fifth semester. And all this in a

industrial township, where everyone knew everyone else. It was going to be difficult to face my parents when I got back home.

During this time, there were two free mock-cats held in our college. One by T.I.M.E., and one by IMS. I gave both just to see what all the hoopla surrounding this stupid exam was. Getting 85 and 90 percentile overall in them added nothing to my false confidence. It was impossible for me to get through a competition which involved 1.8 lakh other aspirants (at that time).

However, the news that Infosys was coming to our campus galvanized me. I studied almost 2-3 hours a day (a humongous number by my standards) for the written Infosys test. It's a different matter altogether that I had finished the George summers puzzles book halfway in the first year itself just to kill time.

Anyway, I made it to Infosys. The other five people from my township didn't. My parents found it hard to believe that I alone of all six could make it.

I went back home and could face my parents again. That's when my mom brought up the subject of CAT/GRE/GATE etc. She said I had to take at least one among those exams for further studies and should choose one. I had already spent three years in Engineering and didn't want to waste two more years studying technical stuff again. So, CAT it was for me.

My mom was a little disappointed by this choice of mine. Why, you ask? Well, the other five were all taking up GRE.

I spent the seventh semester back in college in as careless a fashion as I had the fifth semester. Meanwhile, another IT company (Perot Systems) also decided to offer me a job and I decided to join it since they were also offering me a chance to do my final semester project there.

Meanwhile, I had filled up the form for CAT-2004 and had decided to give the exam in Bangalore. My preparation for the exam by then, consisted of solving the DI book of IMS (taken from my room-mate) and the two mocks I had written earlier. Seeing this, one of my friends bet me that I would not cross the 90 percentile mark in CAT. I took the bet. Also, on being goaded, I said out loud that I would go for only the top three (ABC) or nothing else. This happened in August and I was the butt of all CAT-related jokes for the next four months.

I reached Bangalore the morning before CAT-day. After spending the whole day looking at the pretty females on MG Road, I called up my old school friend (who was not taking CAT, but instead had just a sessional exam on Monday) and went to a pub at ten in the night. We kept on guzzling beer and head-banging to the rock music being played by the DJ till 2:00 am. After the pub owner chased us out, we went to a restaurant and had chicken till 3:00 am.

Finally, we decided to call it a day and my friend dropped me at my hotel room at 3:30 am. The exam was supposed to start at 10 am so I had 6.5 hours to rest.

Or so I thought.

I was rudely kicked awake at 6:30 am by my hotel room-mate who informed me that we had to leave the hotel room by 7:00 am. Being in no state to argue, I somehow managed to get freshened up enough to go out with all of my hotel room-mates and grab a coffee.

When the papers were handed out to us in the hall, I was a bit surprised to see just 123 questions instead of the 150 I was expecting. Both the mocks I had taken had contained 150 questions each and this real thing did not. Judging by the uncomprehending looks on the faces of everyone else in the hall, this was an unexpected blow right in the solar plexus.

During the next two hours, took the paper very calmly. Occasionally even taking time out to look at the more visually enticing members of the opposite sex. When I compared my answers to the various institute keys, I knew I had done well. However, despite my confidence there was no way I was getting a call from any of the big three. So at the end of the seventh semester (December-2004), I went home planning to join Perot Systems for my final semester project and the consequential job in Noida.

Come December 25th, and I read on rediff.com that CAT results had been declared and also that a site called PaGaLGuY.com had “leaked the results”. That was the first time I visited the site and found that there was absolutely no mention of the results whatsoever. It was just a simple forum where some people discussed CAT. Figuring that there would be hundreds of forums like this, I did not think much about it (just: what a weird name!) and went back home from the cyber-café.

However, the next day there was a lot of coverage in the media about the CAT results. Again I went to the cyber-café, and found that the CAT results had actually been declared. And, surprise of surprises, I had got a percentile of 99.05 overall, which gave me a lone call of IIM Calcutta.

That day, my friend lost the bet. I won something more important, I won my self-belief.

Well, unfortunately the GD-PI process is a whole different ball game from the CAT, as I found out later. Going into the C GD-PI with the same level of “preparation” as I did for CAT, I was a nervous wreck by the time the GD started (my first GD ever, incidentally). Things turned out as bad as they could possibly have. Out of the total 15 minutes given for discussion, I got a total air-time of 10 seconds.

Things went from bad to worse during the interview with the panel

members laughing at my answers. It was a relief when the interview was finally over.

I came out of the hall and walked straight-out of the waiting hall without bothering to look back at the people asking me how my interview went. I knew the result of my interview as soon as I went home to my college hostel. I remember crying a lot in my room. I remember thinking that I had messed up the best opportunity that God had given me in my short life of 20 years. I remember getting up at 4:00 a.m. every morning for the next one month to go to the temple. I remember sitting there looking at the stone idols hour after hour, second after second. I used to finally come back to the mess, have breakfast, and sleep.

However, all good things have to come to an end, and so do all bad things. I was lucky in the fact that some of my best friends were there with me in college and they told me in no uncertain terms what they thought of my first attempt. I had proved almost everybody wrong. I had college toppers come up to me and tell me that I was the “surprise package” for this year’s CAT. There were discussions in the college hostels about who the most intelligent person in the batch was, and my name started featuring prominently in these discussions.

The fact that I could do all this by just writing a stupid exam was shocking to me. I was a perennial in the discussions too. I was always the guy who came in second. I was always the small-town boy who liked to live away from the glare of the spotlights.

After the CAT results however, the reality was different. I had unknown people come up to me, shake my hand and say, “good try man”. I had people saying, “Oh! You’re Soham?” when I told my name to them. I felt good.

Well, I finally decided to join Infosys after college. Since the joining date was quite late, I decided to teach part-time at the local CAT-coaching institutes. This ensured that my studies for CAT were also

up to scratch. I put in some long hours for the exam this time around and was doing quite well when I joined Infosys Mysore.

The next couple of months went by smoothly. And I promptly lost touch with all the preparation I had done over the last few months. When the D-day was four days away, I was informed that I had to relocate and join the Chennai office on the Monday after CAT.

Needless to say, the exam was screwed up for me. I checked my result only the day after the results came out and the overall was 92 percentile for me. I had screwed up in DI this year (72 percentile) after screwing up in Quant the last time around. I had a nasty feeling that somehow, the verbal section was to be my nemesis the next year.

It was preparing for CAT 2006 when I finally started getting a little more active on PG. After CAT 2006, I even started participating on the CAT-retest thread. This was the year when there were lots of mistakes in the question paper and I was not happy about it. On top of that, I had got screwed in verbal as I had predicted. For the second time in my CAT-journey, I had a 99+ score and a lone call to show for it (IIM Indore).

Although I did join a coaching institute for the first time in my life (for GD-PI), my heart was not in it. This was primarily because I had already fallen in love with IIM Calcutta, the same institute which had rejected me the first time I had crossed the boundaries of CAT. I could not think about any other institute other than C. It was with this kind of a mindset that I went for the Indore GD-PI. The GD was a bit better than my C interview two years back, but the interview was even more pathetic.

I came back laughing this time around, since I knew in my heart that the next year was going to be MY year, no matter whether I converted or not. The horror stories of people leaving converts only to get the same institute the next year again did not deter me. When

the final results came, I was waitlisted at 68 for I. I still do not know how far did the wait-list move for IIM Indore for the batch of 2007-2009.

As I started approaching CAT 2007, I heard myself asking some critical questions. I wondered why I wanted to go through all this torture again. Was I a masochist or what? And to top it all off, I was not too happy with the current state of my career. I understood that if I wanted to do an MBA, I had to draw a line somewhere. I could not go on writing this stupid exam year after year just to prove a point. That's when I decided to write all the MBA entrance exams I could. I filled up the forms of CAT, XAT, JMET, IIFT, FMS, MDI and even SNAP. I wanted to take admission this year, no matter if I got my dream college or not.

But having screwed up three different sections in my three previous attempts, all I was praying for was that CAT should not contain four sections this year.

The night previous to CAT, I did not booze. I went to bed at 10 in the night and stayed wide-eyed and awake all through to the next morning. However, one good thing is that I had logged off from PG for the last two-three days and was not talking much about CAT with anyone.

I took CAT with as much of a cool mind as I could muster. When I came back home and checked the answer keys of the various institutes, I was scoring marks ranging from 124 to 144 out of the 300. I was clearing all the cut-offs by a big margin and I had a huge grin on my face that night. Fate had good things in store for me this year and I knew it.

Anyway, I took all rest of the exams after heavy bouts of drinking the previous night before, and the results confirmed what I had begun to suspect since my results in CAT-2004. I was good in these exams,



whether I drank or not. The results which were out before the CAT results showed my suspicions to be true. I received calls from IIFT, SIBM, IIT Bombay etc. but all I was praying to God was that my IIM Calcutta interview should be the last of my interviews. I wanted to take all the rest of the GD/PIs as preparations for the big one.

CAT results came, and it was exactly as I had hoped. ILACK, and C was at the last! I finally had my second chance to convince the IIM Calcutta panel about how badly I wanted to join their institute. And this second chance had taken me three more years to achieve.

Anyway, even the results of the exams I took after CAT came out happy for me. I got calls from all the institutes I had applied to except IIM Bangalore. All my overall percentiles were above 99.6. Just one problem, the FMS date was clashed with my IIM Calcutta interview. Lots of people I knew got their date for FMS changed. I didn't purely because I did not want any interview after the biggest one. Consequently, I had to skip the FMS interview.

It was during this time that I started thinking about how everything was going according to my plan. Was it because of my hard work? NO. I had worked the hardest in CAT-2005 and that had fetched me my lowest marks. Nothing I could think of could explain the way that everything was happening just as I had prayed for.

Except one thing. Destiny. It was the only thing that explained why my IIM Calcutta interview was at the last. I knew then that that there was nothing that was going to stop me from getting into Joka this year around. It did not matter that I had filled up zillions of forms. It did not matter that I had even gone as far as Pune to give interviews for colleges which I never wanted to join. It did not matter that I had already quit my job.

I decided to put my birthday celebrations on 10th April on hold since the IIM results were supposed to come out on 11th April and I

wanted to give both my convert and birthday party together. However, the Supreme court gave me a nice birthday gift on 10th by removing the stay order on the OBC implementation. This meant a substantial delay in the release of the results and a substantial increase in my nicotine intake (which went up by 400 percent). The only thing which kept me sane in this time was the fact that I had converted XLRI.

Well, the results finally came out on the 1st of May. IIM Bangalore declared it's results at 1:00 am on 1st of May and IIM Calcutta was the next in line at 10:00 am. After checking the IIM Calcutta results (rather getting them checked by my lucky charm), I did not bother checking the other results. I had converted both the PGDM and PGDCM courses and was going to Joka at last, three years after I first had the opportunity, and missed it.

At the end of my CAT journey, I realised many things. CAT for me had not been about how much hard work I could do. It had been a question of how many failures I could take, and still have the courage to try. Rocky Balboa's saying proved true for me.

It was also about testing the limits of my desire for something. CAT demanded both passion and detachedness from me. I realised that just passion for the exam would make me crazy with tension and just being detached was simply not possible. That is when I challenged myself. I asked myself whether my spirit to get into IIM Calcutta was so much that it could overcome itself and help me remain calm during the pressure cooker situations. I found that I could answer myself in the positive.

And finally, I realised that it is not what others say that matters, but what you want. It does not matter what percentile you have in CAT, but to get into your dream institute. For me, the objective in my final attempt had not been to hit, maim or kill the cat, but to get into IIM Calcutta.

Finally after seven IIM Interviews, six appraisal cycles at work, five months of unpaid professional life, four CATs, three years of preparation, two useless 99+ percentiles and one bloody good IIM Calcutta interview, I land up at my college - Joka.

Hopefully I'll learn faster here.

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# **Rushikesh Humbe**

## **Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad**

### **Class of 2006-08**

**Scored 99.71 percentile in CAT 2005**



This that and 'All About Cracking The CAT'

After my CAT results I was getting requests from people asking for some CAT tips. I promised all of them that I will write one post which will comprise my experiences with CAT and some tips based on that.

Some of the requests I received was how I improved from mere 77 percentile to 99.7 percentile. I will try to cover this part also but before that let me tell you something. CAT is an exam for which you can't generalize something based on others performances and many things change as per the individual and his/her capabilities. So before giving gyan (knowledge) on the CAT, I would like to walk you through my journey.

### **My journey - The Foundation**

I came across CAT in year 2002 while studying in third year of my engineering. Initially I was very worried about the English section as my English was beyond improvising (as I studied in Marathi medium

up to my HSC). So I gave up my preparation and concentrated on my engineering studies.

After my campus placements I was exploring the higher studies option and that time I thought I should take CAT a chance. I found myself more suitable for career in management and for that I was ready to prepare at any level. That time last date of application for CAT had already passed so I had only option left and that was to apply for other B-Schools. Hence I decided to write the NITIE exam (that time NITIE used to conduct separate exam which looked less frightening than CAT). With a month of study I wrote NITIE and unfortunately messed up in one section badly. It was not a shock for me when NITIE decided not to give me a final call.

The kick I got from NITIE did some good things to me. First it created confidence in me that I can crack any B-school test and to take revenge for my defeat. I decided not to settle anywhere except IIMs. I attended Career Forum for 3 months which further boosted my confidence in QA and DI. Unfortunately my first employer Bajaj, placed me in Aurangabad instead of Pune and I didn't have other option than to join it. My decision to continue with Bajaj was based on calculated risk to gain some valuable time to prepare for CAT. In Aurangabad there was no coaching available so I decided to prepare for CAT on my own. That year I wrote CAT, JMET, XAT, IIFT and FMS but was not able to crack any of them. Every time I had some excuse for not able to crack the exam. These excuses kept decreasing my confidence.

After spending (I can also say wasting) my very important 09 months in Bajaj Auto I got the feeling that I am losing a lot for CAT. If not CAT then at least I wanted a good career to bank on. I realised that Bajaj no where fit in my career path. I decided to switch into the IT industry. I had only one name in front of me those days: Tata Consultancy Services (TCS). But somehow I was not getting a chance to take their test. 14 Feb in 2004 proved to be a lucky day for

me. I was there in Pune for ReCAT and found myself standing in a queue for the TCS test. My preparation for ReCAT paid off. I missed the bull's eye by a huge margin of 23 percentile but my preparation helped me to sail through TCS walk-in.

### **One more try**

With my MBA dreams shattered, I joined TCS in April 2004. Initial 2 months I was in great dilemma to take the CAT or not. I found TCS Mumbai and my project good to settle down and I even decided to forget my MBA dream. But after 3 months of thinking on this line I decided to give one more try to CAT. It was too late again so I was in no position to join full length classes and hence decided to join T.I.M.E. Test series. My test scores never crossed 92 percentile. I thought I can do it in the final test but my declining health in those days created some more problems for me. I wrote CAT, XAT, IIFT, JMET, FMS again but got no good news from any of them. I also applied for IRMA with the view of a career in NGO consulting. I got short listed by IRMA but failed to prove to them that I was joining it by choice rather than by chance so was kicked away in interview.

### **Final CAT of my Life**

I was losing greatly due to my CATaholic habits. I was losing not only on the professional front but also in personal life. I thought enough is enough and decided not to write CAT henceforth as it is a demanding exam. People convinced me that GMAT and global MBA is good deal for a person like me. The big worry here was how to finance my education expenses. I thought I would gain some valuable international experience in TCS, earn in dollars and then think about my MBA abroad. In those days TCS also lured me with an onsite assignment in the US for eleven months and I thought I was going in the right direction. I took my diagnostic GMAT test too but thanks to a software error I was not able to view my score and

that prolonged my decision to choose between CAT and GMAT. I had no energy left to take the diagnostic GMAT again. Meanwhile my TCS onsite dreams got shattered due to VISA problems and I came to know that for the next one year I will not be able to go on site.

Next few days were really bad for me. I felt somehow things were not working well for me. One by one my friends were leaving for the US and I was going to bid them goodbye on the airport. The idea of my GMAT dreams getting shattered in front of my eyes was sinking me. In those days someone suggested me to prepare for GMAT, get the score and side by side give CAT a last try and then decide on the options. I liked this and started working on it. But thanks to Simba's article on PG I decided to concentrate on only one of these exams. I thought what to choose between these two and I finally decided that if I forget CAT all my preparation till date will go waste so I decided to give one sincere try to CAT. I realised that the previous two attempts were not full fledged ones. I decided to fully concentrate and focus on CAT preparation. I joined IMS for intensive CAT course and started preparing for the last CAT of my life.

My initial rigor depleted as days passed. It was August and the IMS SimCAT test series was around the corner and I was still not finished with my basic part of the course. The first SimCAT result was positive for me and I scored 94 percentile. Though it was not that great, I thought that after preparation it will surely go upwards. I started preparing but in next few months my score decreased instead of increasing. It varied in the range of 88-95 percentiles which was not a good sign. Every time at the SimCAT I used to decide that this time I will touch the magic figures of 99 but always found myself below 95. My IIM dream was becoming hazy day by day but I never lost my confidence. I used optimization approach. Every time when I performed well I used to appreciate myself and when my performance declined, I learnt from my mistakes instead of blaming myself. I told myself a 100 times that this is the last CAT of my life

and I have to crack it anyhow. I thought in last three years I had made all possible mistakes so if I learn from all of them there will be no more mistakes left to commit on D-Day.

## **The D-Day**

The day before D-day was not good for me. My health was not that good and I was bit worried that the situation would become worse the next day. I prayed to God for that and at the same time prepared myself mentally that even if I had 105 degree temperature, I had to crack the CAT. I spend the day watching a movie and then had dinner with my friend.

On the D-Day I didn't find any negative signs about my health to worry about, so with full confidence, blessings from my family members and wishes from my friends I entered the exam hall and decided to rock the CAT.

When I came out of the exam hall my first reaction was 'the show was not that great for me.' I know my attempts were not good enough to secure a good percentile. I called up home and told there was no hope this year too. With dejected mood I spend the next three or four hours waiting for any answer keys to come up on the web. The first one came on Rediff at 5.00 pm and when I checked my score I got poor a 28 marks. I became very upset with my bad performance but after some time made my mind to accept it.

I spent the next two or three hours calling some people to tell them that it had all ended for me. But meanwhile I thought that although the test was not good for me but it was not all that bad as to score only 28 marks? I suspected the accuracy of keys and decided to crosscheck with other keys. I again hooked on the net and found the CL guys ready with their answers. When I checked my answers with CL keys I got 50 marks with a decent break up in each section. As per their prediction this score would fetch me at least four IIM Calls. I couldn't believe this. I crosschecked again and realised it was the



fact. Though my attempts were less my accuracy that day was awesome. I made one round of calls again and told my near and dear ones that I almost cracked the CAT.

### **Next one Month and 12 days**

After checking my answers with the all the keys available a somewhat hazy picture of my IIM future came in front of my eyes. Some keys told me that I will end up with six calls and some told me I will be lucky if even I get bottom two. These days were quite difficult for me to handle. I was in no mood to study for the other exams of the season like XAT, FMS. Every day I found myself on PG forums discussing which answer keys were correct and which were wrong. Again at the end of day I used to count my score and slept with some more anxiety. Sometimes I even found myself waking up at night and checking my score again and doing the predictions of calls. Now you might feel this was too much but for someone whose three years of hard work was on stake it was unavoidable. Finally I dumped my CAT paper and decided to get rid of all worries. The results were not expected till one month after the exam. It added some more worries and anxiety. The last week of December I forgot I appeared for CAT and enjoyed all New Year dance parties with friends. Then it was announced that results will be out on 2nd January midnight and the final countdown began.

My IIM dream came true after three years of dedication, hard work and commitment. I am sharing this all here so that people will not loose their faith and learn from my example that CAT is hard but not unbeatable.

Always remember CAT is not the end of life. I feel the luck factor was on my side that helped me emerge victorious if it was not there I might have found myself on the other side. So always remember my quote for CAT preparation, “GIVE YOUR BEST AND FORGET

THE REST.”

### **When to start?**

It is always better to start when you are in graduation. The initial preparation should start from 18 months to two years before the date of the test.

### **The Prerequisite**

You should be good in calculations, logic and average English reading speed is a must. You should take a diagnostic test which tells you which areas you are good at and which are the areas of concern for you.

You need to have a strong driving force that always keeps you fighting against all odds to reach your destination. This driving force can be anything like money, good spouse, impressing your girl friend or high flying career ambitions but make sure you have your own reason. Also one needs to have some inclination towards the business and related happenings. This will not help you to crack the test but surely add value when you will be there at the second step that is GD/PI.

### **Classes: How Much Do You Need Them?**

I strongly recommend classes for the first timers because it will help to structure your preparation and also provide you with the environment to maintain your tempo.

For someone like me they can also prove inspirational by impressing fellow classmates in your batch with your scores and speedy class responses. For the second timers or third timers I will strongly advice not to waste time in classes if they have already taken them once. They should utilize their time in identifying the loopholes and work

on to remove them.

## **Action Plan**

After taking a diagnostic test and analyzing the scores one gets a fair idea of where one stands and how much more improvement is required to hit the bull's eye. Don't rely on the coaching institute to make an Action Plan for you. Make one of your own and try to follow it. Tracking the progress area-wise always helps.

## **Test Series**

This is a very crucial part of your CAT preparation. I still remember the famous quote about the test series - "Practice tests are like mirror to tell you how beautiful you look but definitely its you who has to decide how much make-up you need to put on!!"

A good test series helps in identifying the areas you need to improve at and also tells you where you stand in comparison to the others in the race. Take the feedback positively and use them to build your preparation.

Take every test as a new challenge and always try to beat the test rather than allowing it to beat you. This way it is fun to give and number of tests and you will find the final encounter nothing but one of the tests.

## **Some Sectional Tips**

### **Verbal Ability**

Build your vocabulary. Baron's word-list is sufficient for a CAT aspirant but make sure you just don't mug the words but get used to their meaning by doing some daily reading.

For grammar part, you need basic knowledge of English grammar and you can improve your expertise by doing intensive practice.

Prioritizing which questions to solve and which to leave is very important for this area. You can learn it by extensive practice of sectional papers on VA.

Book: Objective English by R.S. Agarwal (S. Chand Publication)

## **Reading Comprehension**

I rate this as the most critical section of all the CAT paper as it can make or break your CAT dream.

Most of the non convent background students found this section tough due to lack of practice. I assure you, how so ever bad reading speed you have you can surely improve it and the only thing you need is some patience and lots of sincerity. You should make reading a part of your life.

Make reading your daily habit like your lunch and dinner. I recommend Hindu and Business Standard newspapers and Business World magazine for daily reading. About the other books don't pick any book just because you want to improve your reading. Pick the book of your taste that helps you fall in love with reading.

Book: How to Read better and faster by Norman Lewis

## **DI + Logic**

This is the section which doesn't need much effort to master. Selection of questions is very critical in this section. For the calculation part try to not use your pencil much and use some approximation methods to choose best fit answer. For logic I say a basic logical bend of mind plus some practice is sufficient.

## QA

This is the scariest section for almost all CAT aspirants. I will suggest you to be familiar with some basic formulae and don't just mug the short cuts because it is difficult to remember all short cuts taught to you and also use them. Make a habit of answering by SMARTNESS rather than by CALCULATION.

When four options are given to you it is not always expected to solve every problem. You just need to cull out the unnecessary options and select the right one. You will learn this art after practicing a lot for this section.

This is what I can share with you after spending last three years with CAT.

CAT 2003 : 77 Percentile

CAT 2004: 88 Percentile

CAT 2005: 99.71 Percentile

Calls: BLACKI + NITIE

Converted: NITIE, IIM Calcutta, IIM Ahmedabad, IIM Lucknow, IIM Kozhikode and IIM Indore.

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# Govar Balakrishnan

## Indian Institute of Management, Indore

### Class of 2004-06

My story! - Inspiration (?!!) for the late starters.

Caveat: Please don't take this post seriously if you are real serious in preparation. If you are lagging in preparation, I guess this post will zap you up. :)

#### **Starting problem**

I took the first CAT in 2001. I didn't know anything about CAT, the competition prevailing, and the type of questions that can be expected. I didn't know the USP of different institutions either. I took it just because I wanted to do something useful during the last of my college days. I already had a job in Oracle that made me as lax as a guy can be.

I remember taking 5 full time tests, at home, in total. Obviously the test bombed. I wasn't least expecting to get a call. Fortunately the scores weren't disclosed that time. ;-)

#### **Second try**

I was too busy with the work, doing good stuff there. I was also enjoying a good reputation in the company, and most importantly I was enjoying the work along with a good pay. But since coding was something I didn't want to settle with in the long run, I wanted to take CAT in November 2004 with 3 years experience. This was in

June 2003. Since there was 4 months left for Nov 2003 CAT, just wanted to give a shot, a serious one.

I enrolled in IMS correspondence. I didn't take the full course because I had a real tight schedule in the company, and I was always thinking in the back of the mind that Nov 2004 CAT is for me. Materials started piling up every week, and didn't even touch. And then, one fine day - the usual enlightenment woke me up - made me take the books. Then joined PG, and closely followed the things here, and suddenly I wanted to give a full try.

I was overconfident about English, and I didn't spend a single minute for English apart from the 40 minutes in exam. This I suspect was a real mistake. I only concentrated (???!!) on Quant, and I was confident that DI would automatically come (Second mistake!).

## **Ranks**

I was never in the top 100s anytime. My usual IMS ranks were in the range 600 to 1000 kinds, with intermittent trespassing either side. The highest I got was some 201 once. But take home tests (AIMCAT papers) were the real cushion. After evaluation most of the time I found that I was close to AIR 50s and 100s. Don't ask me why I didn't get such ranks in SimCATs. I don't know. But then, I must add: SimCATs really sucked. They were outdated - to say the least.

## **CAT**

I guess I had a consistent average performance in both the CATs - the leaked one and the next one. I remember getting some 60+ in the leaked CAT. Low by all standards.

The 'real' CAT was equally bad. I remember getting some 50 to 55s, as per the IMS key. But people who claimed 60s and 65s got lesser

than me finally. So, I really don't know what my score was. All I know is: I got 98.1 percentile, calls from L and I.

## **Interviews**

L interview was a nightmare (as posted in PG), the worst one can expect. I interview was cool, and naturally I'm in I now.

Wanted to post this for a long time, and got the time now - tomorrow is a holiday for us here. Some friends say I must have went according to my original plans and should have taken CAT seriously next year to get into A/B/C. But I'm in IIM Indore, what the heck? Feeling satisfied.

For those who didn't make it, well, there's always a next time. Trust me, there is no such thing as geniuses getting 98/99, and the second rung getting 96/97. It's mostly a matter of luck and sincerity in preparation. I'm stating this as a fact because after being with 6 months with people who scored between 97.5+ and 99.8s, I'm quite convinced that preparation and luck matters a lot. Better luck next time!

Some myths and facts based on some questions I've been asked:

**Myth:** Sub-98, I wont get calls.

**Reality:** There are people in our batch with 97.5 whereabouts, although few and far between. Typically, if your resume is different, you stand a chance.

**Myth:** Sub 90 in one section, I wont get calls.

**Reality:** We have 2/3 that have 80 whereabouts in one section. But then, I haven't spotted a guy with less than 90 percentile in VA.

**Myth:** I can't improve CAT scores.



**Reality:** I've seen people from 68/70 percentiles one year getting 99 percentiles next year, with sincere preparation. Trust me, they weren't prodigies.

**Myth:** Percentiles matter for converting GD/PIs to final calls.

**Reality:** It doesn't appear to be so. Percentile effects, if anything, would probably be minimum.

**Myth:** Order of interview calls reflects relative positions.

**Reality:** Order of interviews would depend on your CAT registration number. You might end up seeing the same people again and again.

**Myth:** Entry barriers for freshers would be high.

**Reality:** Everything depends on the relative application levels. IIMs try to make a balanced batch. But typically, it's quite true that freshers need more percentiles for getting calls. I don't see a bias in GD/PI though.

Well, for all those who crossed the 98/99 percentile barrier, congrats. Get ready for the real rat race. Most importantly, brush up your current affairs etc, and read a lot of newspapers. If possible, join some of the coaching institutes to take training (IIM Bangalore guys would conduct a GD/PI course in Bangalore) or form some interest groups made of aspirants who got calls. Make sure that you aren't so close to those guys because that would bring a personal touch, which would make it informal.

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# Praveen Kusnoor

## Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies, Mumbai

### Class of 2008-10



Finally after much deliberation and much coaxing from my fellow Puyas whom I love so much now, I am posting in the most sacred thread in PG. Mine is not a success story but its one hell of a story! Puyas, hold on to your seats and read this journey of mine. It's been a great experience and one that I would cherish for my lifetime!

Now let's see, how did it all start? My father is an MBA himself and I guess that is one big reason why this CAT seed was sown in me. So, in my third year of Engineering, I decided to start preparing for CAT. The moment I looked at the pattern of the previous years I knew it was to my liking (have always been quick to grasp things you see).

#### **CAT 2004**

That was the year I joined the IMS classroom course (Yeah, I am quite an oldie with CAT). As the year rolled on I realised that I was good in QA and DI but lacked a bit in VA. I was shocked at that realization. Here I was, an ICSE pass out where English is like God-types and was struggling to clear the VA cut-off! I just couldn't figure out what was going wrong. But I must admit, I never gave it my 100

percent as I had the college work to juggle with. It was in the holy month of October that we (me and my friend) decided that what would start burning the midnight oil. One month of serious preparations and we really had made some grounds. I was good at QA and DI and my friend was an absolute rockstar in VA. This was great learning as we realised that the reason we had our respective weaknesses was that we never attempted enough in the weak sections. We started attempting more (just to remind you people that prior to 2004 CAT was a bang bang!) and lo and behold our overall scores started to sky rocket. So by the D-day we felt quite confident of doing well.

## **D-Day**

As CAT would have it, it was the first time that differential marking was introduced and I became one of the many victims of CAT. DI which was my strong section did not go too well. I got stuck in the two markers and that was it!

Final percentile - 95.12 with 88 something in VA (still my nemesis ha!). Won't even mention DI.

## **CAT 2005**

This feeling of so close yet so far always hurts! Now that I knew I was close and not that bad, I started with renewed vigour again in July. I thought the best way to prepare for CAT was by taking mocks and trying to minimize the weaknesses by analysing them. But as fate would have it, I had joined a company by then and since I wanted to do well in my first company as well, my CAT preparations took a real beating. I felt that I was out of steam, come November and then the results proved me right. It was my worst performance in CAT. Percentile - 91-odd percentile.

## **CAT 2006**

I felt that this would be my year as I had persisted for so long now. My work had fallen into place now and I could finally concentrate on CAT. Oh! and I forgot to mention, my friend whom I had mentioned about earlier had got an IIM Bangalore call in the 2004 CAT with a 97.3 percentile (No, he was not a school topper or anything like that but this just reminded me of rpradeeph's satire). He could not convert it and so here we were two big hopefuls trying CAT for one more time. I thought the preparation was going pretty smooth with both of us consistently hitting the 98 plus percentiles in the mocks with decent scores in all the sections.

### **D-Day**

What a shocker of a VA section!! This time I mixed caution with aggression and since the paper did not have too many questions, one could afford to do that. Did whatever I could in the paper and came out. Checked the solutions and hell I could figure that VA was going to be dicey. I did not do great in QA - 45 marks (cant remember the percentile), DI - 50 marks and VA -15 marks!! All hopes dashed! The coaching institutes were predicting 30-35 for me. Oh! and my friend screwed up his DI with 35 marks in that section.

Percentile - 96.6 odd. Got a lone SPJ call with that which I could not convert!

## **CAT 2007**

Now, this was now or never for me. By this time I had decided to apply to all the top B-schools in the country as I was getting desperate. Before this year I had written only CAT and XAT as the two exams.

I still wondered what was lacking in my performance and realised

that the culprit was not me getting overwhelmed by the occasion but it was taking too many mocks and getting used some set sort of a routine. I cut down on my mocks and focused more on analysis and sharing of thoughts. I again did reasonably well in the mocks. 98 plus or even 99 plus became a regular affair. I felt extremely confident this time and along with a hoard of other exams to write, I thought this time I won't be left without any options.

## **D-Day**

I realised that if I had to get all sic calls (which was the sole aim) I had to go with all that my heart could offer and see what happened then. I knew Math wasn't as easy it was last year but I went back to playing the big game. VA was dicey as usual but slightly lesser so. I did all I could in the two and half hours and came out reasonably satisfied.

My attempts were QA - 16, DI -19, VA - 21. This was good number of attempts and I finally thought I had done well. Then, I checked the solutions and it was the worst moment of my life! I had missed most of the tricks the QA paper had to offer and ended up with a measly 34 marks! DI went very average with just 46 and VA languished in the late 20s. I ended up with an overall of 97 percentile.

There it was, Four attempts and not once had I managed to crack it! I was inconsolable for a week. Then my father told me something I shall never forget. He said - 'Why is your thinking so myopic? Why dont you look at the bigger picture son? What do you want, only an IIM degree or an MBA? You have equally good options to choose from, now don't waste your life trying only for an IIM degree. You have hit a ceiling and you have to move on if you want to become a better person'. Man, I shall never forget these words. It came to me at the time when I needed it the most. Thanks dad!

My father's words are all that I have to say for all you Puits. Try your best at CAT but don't be a fool and just keep at it year after year. After all, its the bigger picture that's important right?

And from my signature you can possibly make out how I feel after all this. The crown less shall be king, no doubt about it!!

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# Tripurari Prasad

## Indian Institute of Management, Shillong

### Class of 2008-10

**Scored 96.65 percentile in CAT 2007**



TO THINK IS EASY. TO ACT IS DIFFICULT. TO THINK AND ACT IS THE MOST DIFFICULT.

I was really skeptical about posting in this revered thread as I feel I am no where near the likes of people who post here. I don't know if my story would be an inspiration for anyone. But for me, many of the stories here made me what I am today.

#### **Before JAN 2007**

As part of my background I hail from a middle class family. I was always good at science and math which prompted me to take science. Nobody in my family was from the science background and I suffered a lot from this as no one was there to guide me. I didn't join any coaching institute for IIT preparation and prepared on my own. I was pretty naive and did all kind of blunders hence ended up repeating the year. I joined a local coaching institute and to my bad luck they also turned out to be fraud. This I came to know just after the screening results. I was able to clear the screening but no one was there to tell me how to proceed. Wherever I went they discouraged me. On 15th March 2001 I cried and gave up all hope for IITs and

Prepared exclusively for Anupam Shrivastava

started preparing for other entrance exams.

That was first year of AIEEE. I took all exams and did fairly well, also the state exam through which we get into NITs. I got a very decent rank in that and was pretty sure to get into one of the NITs. Apart from that I was offered civil at DCE. I left the civil seat as I was keen to pursue Electronic Engineering. To my bad luck that year they scrapped the state exam for NITs and took admits through AIEEE. AIEEE was the first to declare results and hence I submitted the fees in a deemed university where I got an admit. After further up gradation they were not ready to return my money. I was also not aware about how second counselling happens for other entrance exams. Hence I ended up giving up seats of great colleges like BIT Mesra, IIT Hyderabad etc. and ended up with a not much known college.

However after this phase I put all my energy into my studies and was the topper of the university. All this time I used to think may be sometime in life I will get what I deserve. Placements started and I ended up with a great US based company which many people desired and I was one of lucky few who got in a core Electronics Company.

During my college days I always saw people more keen towards GRE but I had something else in mind. There were few guys who used to prepare for CAT. They had made a group and used to discuss and do GDs. I came to know about CAT through them. I was fired from inside as I found out more and more about CAT.

However I couldn't take CAT that year due to family pressure. My brother had died last year and I was in total shock. I decided to take CAT after I joined the firm.

As the year passed I bought all materials needed for CAT preparation. My job started and I came to Chennai. Life changed



totally after that. It was end of July 2006 when I joined. I was to appear for CAT 2006. I couldn't join any mocks because of my training schedule which was pretty intensive, also I was directly involved in customer projects due to sudden requirements. I was occupied with three things at one time- training, project and flat hunting. In August, due to some reason, people in Chennai don't give houses on rent. Faced lot of problem as I couldn't find a flat for a month. I had to share a room in a lodge with three other guys. It was 1.30 hours away from where my job was located, thus I couldn't find any time to study. This went on and the D-day came. At the same time I lost a very special person, went under depression and as expected scored 75 percentile. I lost all faith in me.

### **Jan 2007 - Nov 2007**

I finally decided to join Career Launcher, but I was not able to concentrate much due to work pressure and the mental agony that I was going through. I just attended classes and never interacted with anyone. It was at that time I read prem\_ravi's post. It was that day that I cried and promised I won't let myself down. I deserve something and won't let myself down. I need all the things I lost to come back to me. Many a times my 75 percentile used to haunt me; my past too made me feel let down. Then I used to read this thread to take inspiration. My work was still very hectic. It used to start at 8:00 in the morning and work till 10-11 at night. By 12:00 am I used to start my studies which used to go on till 3:00 am. It was getting tough for me as I was not able to study early morning and felt sleepy at night. However I fought back by trying all sort of techniques which used to be like using Amrutanjan on the forehead and tying a wet towel afterwards.

My health started falling down but I never lost hope.

Mock started and I attended T.I.M.E. open mock and Career Launcher (CL) mock the same day. I got around 50 percentile in

T.I.M.E. and 82 percentile in CL and I was shocked to core. I felt all my hard work has gone down the drain. Only good thing was VA was still my strength and I cleared VA cut-off of CL mock.

I read here that we should not be down by seeing mock scores. I carried on with my work. And got better every time. I used to take two mocks and analyze them properly. I learnt a lot by analyzing on how to move forward. However I was still not able to clear all sections. This nagged me continuously. Finally I decided to take leave from work. I made up a false medical certificate and went home to prepare for two months before the actual day.

While surfing PG I got this Rocky Balboa quote which kept me going all the time,

*The world ain't all sunshine and rainbows. It is a very mean and nasty place and it will beat you to your knees and keep you there permanently if you let it. You, me, or nobody is gonna hit as hard as life. But it ain't how hard you hit; it's about how hard you can get hit, and keep moving forward. How much you can take, and keep moving forward. That's how winning is done. Now, if you know what you're worth, then go out and get what you're worth. But you gotta be willing to take the hit, and not pointing fingers saying you ain't where you are because of him, or her, or anybody. Cowards do that and that ain't you. You're better than that.*

I used to do daily one test and used to take one section. My mock scores shot up and I got my confidence back. My mocks were varied from 95-99 percentile. But suddenly I scored 70 percentile in the last Mock. This was a show down and I started thinking what if the same happens on the D-day. That was first time I visited ShoutBox (SB) and that day grondmaster and Harsharocks were online. They helped me out through that.

Harsharocks gave me the links of the mock scores of previous year's

IIM call-getters. It really boosted my spirits and I felt a new energy inside me. With all my energy I revised everything and in the last mock I got 98 percentile with all sections cleared.

I was filled with joy but somehow was getting restless each day. The night before D-day couldn't sleep. I guess it was an emotional affair. Saw the paper and realised that it was based on last year's pattern. I started with my strength VA which had never let me down (always scored around 95-99 percentile in that). This time per RC questions were less. One hour went and I managed to do only 17 questions which were very less as per my performance. I was really disheartened so took up DI and started solving the questions. I couldn't get in terms with paper. Half an hour was left and full Quant was left. I felt I had lost it just managed to do eight questions. Came out with no feelings, nothing. Was just lost.

### **Dec 2007 - Present**

After this, I came back to Chennai and met utsavmamoria through SB. And then the Chennai meet started which was my first outing in the year. I met many wonderful Puys. I had never felt this kind of energy and zest before. I used to personally loathe the place. But after meeting these people I found a new reason to stay there. Also to mention Rajat (rmbt) one of the finest and balanced person I have ever met here. I got to learn a lot from him specially how to be cool and crack GDs.

Results came: 96.65 percentile with 95.34 in VA, DI- 93.89 QA- 88.72 percentile. IIMs dream was lost. However after a long time I got one single IIM call - IIM Shillong.

Today was their interview and I felt this is the time I should write my story. I have converted few other colleges and would be taking one of them. I owe all my GD/PI preparation to utsavmamoria and his GTalk sessions.

## **What I learnt**

CAT: You got to be cold. One should kill all his feelings towards it while attending it.

Don't burn yourself out. I believe in the end I faltered because of working more than needed and in the end I felt saturated. It should be a balanced act.

CAT is not the end. CAT is the means of achieving an end. We often miss the bigger picture.

While preparing for GD/PI I learned and realised it's very important to know oneself. We should not be egoist, one should fully acknowledge his strength and weaknesses.

Analyzing the mocks is the most important thing to do.

While concluding, I would like to share a mail I got when I used to have self doubts. Hope it will help someone as it helped me. It is from utsavmamoria.

*Hi*

*This is all I want to say.*

*I believe that what you are going through we all go through at some point in life, albeit at some different levels.*

*It all boils down to the debate of Ends v/s Means. The end can always justify the means. But each and everything you do may not be focused towards achieving the means.*

*Achieving the End is like the Tour de France. You may not win every stage, you may not always wear the yellow jersey, but in the end the one who endures and comes out on top collectively is the Winner.*

*Faith can move mountains. Just keep faith.*

I finally converted IIM Shillong and joined the 2008-10 batch.

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# Ajith B Prasad

## Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode

### Class of 2008-10

**Scored 98.62 percentile in CAT 2007**

Ever heard of someone who bunked an IIM class to attend another IIM Interview? Well, read on.

#### **My profile,**

- X - 93 percent
- XII - 91.7 percent
- Graduate of NIT Calicut, CSE 2004 - 74 percent
- Working in Oracle since then, 47 Months work experience with the Oracle Financials development team.
- Other Extra/Co-curricular activities - An interview of Kapil Dev for college magazine.
- Physics and Chemistry Olympiads - National level (Which I don't think is of anything significant).
- Some quizzing prizes upto University Level.
- A Web Venture: <http://www.blogpane.com> (This helped me a bit, I should admit)
- Pretty diverse reading habits from technology to history to fiction.

#### **CAT History**

1. CAT - 2003 (The leaked CAT) - 87.xx percentile

2. CAT - 2004 - Don't ask percentiles. The above two were non-serious CATs. But I scored less mainly in Verbal. Realised that I need to pickup my reading habits and prepare well. Took IMS correspondence course, plus mock tests.

3. CAT- 2005 - 97.11 percentile (Breakup QA - 98 percentile, DI - 89 percentile, VA - 88 percentile)

An out of the blue IIM Bangalore interview call. The soul searching began at this point. Prepared very very hard reading up quite a few things, Statistics, Economics, ERP, all the stuff that I could. But I kind of realised another thing at this point. You can't create a good personality overnight. It has to be built up. So, ideally an MBA aspirant should start his profile development early itself. It's something that should happen along with CAT preparations.

March 23, 2006 - IIM Bangalore PGP interview. A misfortune stuck, developed a swelling in my cheek due to a wasp bite. The swelling was so bad that I had to undergo a surgery the day after interview. Attended the GD and interview under painkillers. The GD was good, interview was decent, though nothing exceptional.

Results on April, 11: I was put in waiting list- 47. CAT- 2004 and CAT-2003 IIM Bangalore waiting list statistics indicated that I'll get through. But ultimately got kicked out. I was ok with that because, getting a call itself at 97.11 was something unimaginable. But I happened to get into quite a few troubles in job at this point.

Took a move to a team in Oracle Bangalore from Hyderabad. Better team, great work. I should say I fell in love with the work that I got.

4. CAT - 2006 - This time I prepared with all the mock tests, T.I.M.E., IMS and CL. CAT came and went. Checked the keys, T.I.M.E., CL, IMS, all predict six calls with amazing scores in Verbal.

Results: Better than last year.

98.08 percentile overall  
QA - 90.28 (this was the culprit)  
DI - 98.25 percentile  
VA - 96.8 percentile

No calls from IIMs/SPJain. Didn't apply to MDI.

Misfortune continued to trouble me on the day of XAT (Venue confusion, non-familiarity with Bangalore roads etc.)

Extremely disappointing times. Lost interest in CAT, but, took a backup option at this point. Joined PGSEM at IIM Bangalore after eking out a nomination from Oracle. Reasons: I kind of felt a helplessness over CAT, GMAT wasn't in my radar due to quite a few financial and personal reasons. So, felt it'd be better to join PGSEM.

5. CAT - 2007 - A last chance to redeem a bruised ego. Took the test just like that.

Scores,

QA - 97.6 percentile  
DI - 93.17 percentile  
VA - 96.4 percentile  
Overall - 98.62 percentile

Calls - L and K.

L - Good GD, But pathetic interview. They quizzed me on Economics and it's rare that two economists would agree. Needless to say, a reject.

K - Fish market GD. I chipped in with just two sound points. Rest were submerged in cacophony. But great interview, they tried to



stress me out with questions from 12th standard Physics and Chemistry. But I could answer almost all.

Converted this. (Attended this interview bunking a PGSEM class).

After quite a few deliberations, dropped PGSEM and joining IIM-K PGP 08-10. I can't elaborate all the reasons. The reasons for this switch vary from professional to personal. In fact I would have taken K even if L had worked out, Kozhikode is my hometown.

### **Few suggestions to the aspirants**

1. Your PROFILE is extremely important. It's not that you cannot crack IIM Indore if you have an average profile. But, if you have an average GD/PI, you can still get in if you have good profile. I'd say, things in my profile - PGSEM, blogpane.com etc would have weighed in a little bit towards the final selection. Another friend of mine who too was doing PGSEM took the test just like that, got LACKI calls and LACKI converts. And, after hearing his interview experiences, I'd say the difference in his profile - PGSEM after nomination from his company weighed in a great deal in his final conversions. So, it's important to have some kind of profile building activities- be it NGO work / writing in magazines / organizing events / entrepreneurship / sports / music, all adds value to your profile. And this would ultimately help you in IIMs too.

2. CAT is an extremely unpredictable test. So, have backup options of some sort.

3. Mock tests are perhaps the only good thing that coaching institutes would give to you. There is not much need to read through all that complicated formulas that T.I.M.E./IMS give. Just practice the tests. The composure on the CAT-Day is perhaps the most important thing.

4. Verbal you can't prepare by mugging up word lists. Only way to pick up on that front is to develop good reading habits. Read a variety of subjects, Fiction/ Economics / Current affairs. If you do that for quite sometime, verbal won't be a big problem for you.

5. LUCK matters. No substitute for that. Had I been a little bit less unlucky so as not to be sick on that IIM Bangalore interview day two ago, maybe I would have passed out of an IIM now. But those 'ifs' and 'buts' have no relevance in life. I failed to make it then. I have to accept it whether I like it or not. That's a fact.

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# Harshad Karandikar

## Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode

### Class of 2008-10

**Scored 99.72 percentile in CAT 2007.**

Slightly more than a year ago, I'd started thinking about what I'd say when I posted in this thread. A few days later, I was thinking whether I would ever really have the right to post here.



Disclaimer : I do NOT mean offence or to deride or to look down upon ANY B-school. I personally think that all the places I applied to are good. Otherwise, err, why would I apply there? Warning: This is a really really long one.

### **Early Days**

It all really started in April 2005. I was walking the long walk from the college parking to the classrooms with my classmate. Suddenly, he turned and looked at me with a lot of excitement and said, 'You know, Amey got into IIM Ahmedabad. I gave him an 'ok, so what?' look. IIM Ahmedabad didn't sound like that big a deal to me. He repeated his words a bit incredulously after seeing my reaction, and I suddenly stopped in mid-step and repeated each letter carefully. He got into I-I-M-A??? My friend nodded, and I thought 'Woah! people I know get into places like the IIMs.' At that point I wondered, why not me? And thus started an epic journey which has brought more

twists and turns than I could have ever imagined.

After completing my engineering, I joined an automotive major - the best offer on campus, quite a feat in those days of heady IT recruitment. Within days, however, disillusionment set in. I found it difficult to accept logic like 'you are an Engineer, we can't let you get a marketing profile. You'll get into a technical profile.' I was clear that I wanted to be in marketing, but I soon realised that there was no scope of getting that. At the same time, the April incident was fresh in my mind.

### **The first, amateur attempt**

I started preparing for CAT eagerly. Unfortunately, being a trainee, we were rarely at one location for more than a fortnight. All the moving around did no good to my preparations, as I couldn't attend any mock test series. I studied a lot, but I was naïve about the way CAT works. Engineering had made me used to putting in the hours whenever required, without much thought to the mental aspect of it - the strategy, the planning and the way to condition your mind for the exam. These might sound big words, but I've worked as much on this as on the actual concepts during my subsequent attempts at CAT, and I personally believe it's more about this aspect than knowledge, something which all the coaching institutes tend to miss out on.

I solved a lot of papers, but I had nobody to compare my performance with. PG wasn't big at all then, and I had just a vague idea about it. Anyway, as I was living away from home, I had no access to the net, and we didn't even have a fixed city where we worked, forget a fixed workplace, so there was no chance of accessing it at work either.

## **Botched!**

I was pinning all my hopes on CAT to take me out of the job I was in, and that's where I screwed up. I screwed it up even before I took it. Not through lack of preparation, but because I made it up to be everything in life. 20th November 2005 arrived. I solved the paper confidently, and came out feeling that I'd definitely done well. I had a good number of attempts in all sections. I had a blast all day, and decided to check my performance in the evening with the coaching class keys.

The first section was Quant, and within 10 minutes, my dream was shattered. I had attempted 24 marks worth in Quant (out of 50), and was scoring only five. I had made the most insane mistakes, mostly out of over-confidence, some because of the pressure. I knew that as low as the Quant cut-offs might go (they were calling that year's Quant the toughest ever), it would not hit five. PG or not, I could tell that much. Within minutes, I fell from a high to an incredible low. I still remember those moments. Boy, how many times after that has CAT and the IIMs made me reach that same rock bottom, pathetic state.

I broke down and cried. My parents didn't know what to do, they'd never seen me like that before. They tried to console me, but nothing worked. I plunged into severe depression. The thought that I'd have to spend an entire year in this job before I could give CAT another shot was something which I just could not bear to think of. And yet, that was reality. It was 9 pm already, and I had a bus to catch at 11 to the city I worked in.

A few months passed by miserably, and the situation at the workplace turned from bad to worse. The company suddenly had a change of heart, and decided to place a large majority of us trainees onto the production lines. Within the manufacturing sector, managing a production line, especially in an OEM is one of the most stressful,

thankless, tough and generally unwanted job around.

I managed a decent score in CAT (96.xx), which surprised me a bit, but also made me realize that cracking CAT was well within my grasp, if I treated the paper with a bit of respect and toned down my confidence a little bit. I think the confidence curve is a very steep bell curve. You over or under do it a bit, and it's very likely that you get a sharp decline in performance. You just have to be confident enough to approach it with a carefree attitude and take certain risks in those 150 minutes but not enough to start believing that you can crack it whatever happens.

## **Mauled at MICA**

I got a MICA call with this score. I decided to use this opportunity to check out the A campus. One look at it, and I was hooked. There was something in the air, something intangible and indescribable. A few hours into it, and I was telling myself, whatever I do, one day I am going to deserve this, I am going to deserve to breathe the air I breathe here. My friend (the same one who's result started off this journey) took me on a tour of the campus, and it was love at first sight.

The breathtakingly beautiful architecture, the rich red colour of the bricks, the play of light and shadows in the corridors, the famous view of the library, the famous stairs near the dorms. All along, I couldn't dare to meet the eyes of the people around me. I simply felt I was on a space I didn't deserve to be on. I know it sounds stupid, but that's the way it was. All along, there was one line going through my head, I'll be back, when I deserve it. My MICA call was a disaster. It was an out and out technical interview, and unlike many of my future B-school interviews, including the ones which I finally converted, the panelist refused to understand that there was little point in asking me technical questions. Ten minutes into it, I was curtly stopped in mid-sentence, thanked and asked to leave. MICA,

however, was another place where I really felt like I belonged to. Unfortunately, the people on the other side didn't agree for a while.

I returned home rather scarred by the interview experience. I'd never been mauled this way before. However, I also returned with a hell lot of thoughts swirling about in my head.

## **A different path**

Suddenly, one fine day, I got a call from a friend with whom I'd trekked a lot in my engineering days. We'd worked together in an informal NGO he'd found in Pune, a bit of environmental conservation work. He'd always had the entrepreneurial bent of mind, and he had an idea which sounded like a dream opportunity to me. We, along with five more crazy fellows, decided to start off our own adventure tourism firm. All of us were outdoor freaks, and highly experienced in leading treks in the Sahyadris and Himalayas. The adventure tourism market in Pune and Mumbai was huge (and still is), and we thought that we had a great chance to find a niche location for ourselves in this market (and this analysis turned out to be spot on).

Thus was born our company. A few weeks into it, we had our first major hiccup. It was a sign of things to come in the near future, but there was no way I could have really seen it. It was our very first program. I was leading it, and we were ascending a steep slope en route to the top of a fort. A recent wildfire had burnt down the grassy slopes, and clumps of burnt grass were the only things holding down the baked soil. Half way up it, things got decidedly tricky, as suddenly the clumps started coming off. Having trekked the Sahyadris extensively over the last few years, this situation was not very difficult for me to handle; all it involved was keeping a calm head and making sure that the next hold was secure before leaving the previous one.

There was a bit of trial and error involved, but that was ok. I was in the front, and my father, who was a participant, was right behind. Suddenly, he lost one of his holds, and with it, his nerves. He shouted for help. I had a 30 plus kg sack on my back, containing the rations for the entire group, which prevented me from quickly turning around as the sack threw my body away from the slope when I tried to turn. However, I managed to reach down and give him a hand. He was panicking, and suddenly lost all his other holds, and was left hanging on to my hand. Within seconds, his hand slipped out of mine.

He screamed and slid down the slope, rolled over and then continued tumbling down, side over side, head over heels, bouncing off the rocky incline. I saw his entire body fall between my legs, and watched him roll over and beyond a rock patch out of my vision, over a hundred feet below. My own father, going down like that in front of my eyes. Sheer panic gripped me, and I lost my head and with it, my holds. I slipped five to six feet, and almost joined him when all the years of experience of trekking suddenly made the difference. In a moment, I calmed down and dug my fingers and toes hard into the crumbling soil, deep inside, as if nailed to the slope. I hung on there, literally for life, panting. I gave myself a few seconds, and then snapped out of it. I had a job to do here - protect the 30 odd people below me who were now in various stages of outright paranoia.

I found a good hold, turned around and sat down. There was a serene smile on my face, which I was later informed, had freaked out the people immediately below me. I couldn't do anything about my father, as there was no way I could descend, the slope below was full of people stuck halfway with nowhere to go. Thankfully my colleagues, the co-leaders, were at the end, and had already started the rescue process. There is this thing about me, in times of extreme stress, I suddenly tend to snap into an incredibly calm frame of mind. It has come to my help on multiple occasions, most of the times if I hadn't kept my head, things would have been undoubtedly



a hell lot worse than they ended up being.

I sat down and started giving instructions to the rest of the group. I asked them to calm down and gave them specific instructions on how to find good holds which could let them hang on comfortably for a while. Slowly, one by one, I managed to get the entire group into stable positions. We all watched as my colleagues threw a rope and got my father up, covered in blood and bruises, barely conscious. One by one, each of us stuck on the slope was helped up to the top of the ridge we were ascending, a position of relative safety. I then scrambled down the slope to reach my father. After the fall I didn't know what to expect, and frankly, I was expecting the worst. He was taken into emergency medical care. After falling down over a hundred feet, he had come out with some bad bruises and a slightly rattled mind. I did not know how to thank god.

What a start! We lost a potentially big long term contract with an IT firm which we were close to signing. Unfortunately, a few of their employees had come as participants and they went back, understandably, very very shaken.

The following week, I was supposed to lead a wildlife camp to a tiger reserve in eastern Maharashtra. I was so traumatized by what had happened, that I thought of pulling out. I don't know what made me go, and I did. The camp went great, the only problem was that our bus had a major accident while returning. Within a week, I was again moving people covered with blood to safety, this time with a blood covered face myself. The fact that our group consisted of five school kids and one pensioner did not help in reducing the hysteria. I soon had five sets of crazy parents going hysterical in Pune while my colleague and I tried to make sure that first aid was administered, that some sort of transport could be arranged to the nearest hospital and that nobody ran off with our luggage. We were in the middle of nowhere, with three young scared girls and surrounded by a crowd of over a hundred people, and a pensioner who had got a head injury.

What a start!

Things, however, started falling into place after that business wise. I however, was unhappy with the way things were moving within it. I had very different ideas of running a business. In our eagerness to do what we loved, and the typical immaturity and over confidence of 22 year olds, we'd left out what, in retrospect, was an incredibly dumb thing to do; discussing the way we would run things after we started off. I quickly started realizing that it did not make sense to continue in this way. That was when CAT started coming back to my mind. I started channelizing my frustration into CAT.

One very important thing my venture taught me was the value of money. I was in severe financial trouble then, and the only way I managed to make ends meet was because I stayed with my parents. I could barely manage enough funds to buy all the institute forms. I realised how easily we take money for granted. Money is, of course, not the most important thing in life by a long margin, but it takes a state of penury to really understand the fundamental necessity of it. Things were so bad that at most of the time I was wondering where I'd get money to keep going. I completely stopped eating out, telling my friends that I'd had dinner before coming. Coffee shops, with their exorbitant rates, appalled me (they still do, actually, but I've stopped being a cheapskate now that I can afford it). As rough as it was, I honestly believe it did me a hell lot of good.

### **Enter PG!!!**

I had registered on PG in Feb 2006, though I didn't return till the CAT season was well underway. When the T.I.M.E. mocks started, I realised that while it was a great place to understand where I stood with respect to the competition, it was also a great community. I became quite active, though I doubt anybody knew me before, I caused a bit of an issue with a thread questioning the moderator's decision in the week leading up to CAT.

What PG taught me was invaluable on two occasions: First, the mental aspect of CAT. This was an angle which I had completely missed. I read about how people tackled the paper (with mocks), and tried out different strategies. I played around till I reached what was, for me, the perfect strategy. It was slightly complicated and needed discipline to prevent it from going awry, but it worked for me like a charm. I started hitting the 99s consistently, and was feeling in great shape. I knew (after hanging around on PG for a few months) that if I could break into the 99s regularly in the T.I.M.E. mocks, I could easily crack CAT. Thankfully, I never let the elitist nature of PG get to me. I strongly believe that PG is extremely elitist. Not in a snobbish kind of way, but in the way that most of the guys who post here are very very good. Even for a person who used to get 99s regularly, it took a conscious effort not to get demoralized by looking at the mock scores of the PG junta.

## **Attempt # 2**

Things were going well, when I hit a roadblock in September. Suddenly, for no apparent reasons, I started doing terribly in mocks. I regularly started going into the lower 90s or lower than that. I reached my nadir with a stunning 53 percentile in the first mock of September. I badly screwed up one section or the other in each test, sometimes with negative scores. Things weren't going great at the work front, and I started panicking. My scores dipped even lower, and I was in a helpless state of mind for a few weeks. This was when my tendency to snap out when faced with a bad situation helped.

Suddenly I was telling myself, if I am going down, I am going down fighting. I was going to give it everything and if I still didn't make it, then I didn't care. Although the last few weeks had severely dented my confidence, I knew that I was good enough to make it even on a normal day. I kept reminding myself about that as I hurtled from one bad mock to another. Then came the SIMCAT on the first Sunday of November, the one where IMS comes with an out and out

hatke (different) paper. I took a distinct liking to the paper, and ended up with a cool 99.63. Back on course, with just two weeks to go!

CAT 2006 was the calmest three hours of my life, surpassed only by CAT 2007. Despite the high stakes, I somehow managed the balancing act perfectly. I was amused at people squirming in their seats, praying, putting their heads down and closing their eyes and trying to calm down. I was just bored and wished they'd get on with it. I was also very interested in what surprise element would be there. I had started looking at CAT like a game, a battle of wits. I had huge respect for the people who set the paper, in the sense how they managed to have half the world screaming in fright with a minor tweak here or there.

Unfortunately, that respect was dented a bit after seeing the CAT 2006 verbal section. Five minutes into, I realised that it was very dicey. I decided to breeze through the section without spending much time on it, and attempt the maximum number of questions. I came out with a good feeling, but after last year, tried to keep my expectations low. Anyway, I knew that the VA keys could just about be anything. The night of 19th November 2006 was a sort of a *deja vu*. I had cracked Quant and DI big time. The problem this time was VA. All the coaching classes were giving me between 2 to 12 marks in VA, again woefully less for getting an IIM Call. For the second year in a row, I thought I had managed to screw it up. And this time in the section which I considered my strength. VA was and is easily my strongest point, despite getting a 99.63 in Quant this year. Again, I was devastated to the point of breaking down. I checked each and every answer key with the hope that there would be somebody who'd agree with my answers. I solved the paper again and was still convinced with the answers I had marked. PG was my help and support then. For the next two weeks, I scoured the threads, searching for anything that would give me solace.

## **Will I, wont I?’**

The wait for the result was agonizing. It came with the added feeling of impending doom. I had no idea what I'd do if I didn't get calls. I had to move out of the business, that was for sure, but how other than by doing an MBA, I had no clue. 2nd Jan 2007 came. As usual, all the IIM sites and PG crashed when the results were out.

I waited with bated breath and opened the IIM Answer key with trembling hands. The results page wasn't opening, so I decided to check what I'd finally ended up with in VA. The first answer was wrong. Then right. Wrong. Right. Right again. Wrong. With each right, my score went up 5 marks. And so continued the game, till I ended up with 9 corrects and 9 wrongs, a score of 27!!!! Eligible for an A call also now! I tried the results site again, and got through. 99.31, with a minimum sectional of 96.31 in verbal. Woahhhhhh!!! A few minutes later, the IIM Ahmedabad calls list came out. I had an Ahmedabad shortlist!

The next few minutes passed in wild celebrations as my bewildered parents couldn't believe it. I had told them that there was no chance of me getting any calls at all. IIM Calcutta followed later in the evening, and I was on cloud nine. B tormented everybody for days with its site (it wasn't working for almost 48 hours). I missed out there, not surprisingly now that I understand their criteria. But I had A, beyond my wildest dreams. I would have been happy with a 80 plus percentile in VA, which would have given me some decent non-IIM Calls. I was ecstatic that evening, as I danced around in the house. I called up my girl friend, and she couldn't believe it too. God, life was good those few days!

## **The Golden Days**

The other calls came out in the next few days, as I started my GD/PI preparations eagerly. I attended all the sessions in two to three classes

and listened eagerly to each and every word. I practiced hard for the GDs, averaging six to seven GDs a week, all with IIM Call-getters. We had great fun, about 20 of us, meeting up in a smoke-filled class room and practicing and debating and arguing till the wee hours. We advised each other and helped each other iron out obvious flaws. All of them are now in the IIMs, doing summers at the moment. I still feel in retrospect that I spent less time than I should have.

The interviews. I spent every possible minute preparing, reading up stuff, brushing up my Engineering basics (not that they did much good). January beginning quickly turned to January end, as the call letters started arriving, and it finally sunk in that I actually had a chance at the IIMs. The first interview was on 14th February, IIM Kozhikode. IIM Ahmedabad on the 18th. Two of the places I wanted to be in the most were lined up first. I was nervous, and at the same time, very excited.

February 14 came, and early in the morning I found myself at the Pune railway station with my girl friend, who'd come to see me off, that being the only time we'd get together on a day which we would otherwise have spent together. The train journey passed in a blur, as I was dreaming of the IIMs, and IIM Kozhikode to be specific. The GD and the interview went ok.

Ok, a clarification here: It did sound pretty ok to me back then, now when I read it again, I get the strong feeling that I gave the panelists the best 15 minutes of their day in terms of the humour quotient.

A, next. This time I strolled into campus like I owned the place. In a way, I deserved to be there, at least for the day. Again, my poor friend had to bear with me, though this time at least I had a valid reason for it. If MICA had been a mauling, I had no words for this. Come back after you've stopped rolling on the floor laughing. What a fool I made out of myself! And what an occasion to do it, too! I remember making a joke later that the only way I'd go to IIM

Ahmedabad was if they increased the seats to 557 (those being the number of interview calls they'd given)

Anyway, the interview season continued, with me having a so-so time in almost all interviews. MICA, again, had a great laugh at my expense. IIM Calcutta went fairly well, but then almost everybody had a cool C interview. When asked about my hobby of reading, for some reason, I could only think of an obscure book called 13 and a half lives of Captain Bluebear which, although undoubtedly hilarious, was hardly the thing to talk about in an IIM Interview.

I got a raised eyebrow in reply. L stopped short of shooing me out for my academics, but were pretty blunt about it. Indore was interested in knowing which rivers originated where, and the five or six correct answers I gave didn't make them look too pleased. MDI seemed like a great interview, one which I felt I had a great chance, followed by IIT Bombay, which was by far the best of the season. I was grilled on mechanical engineering, but I answered almost everything to my satisfaction.

### **Which turned out to be fools' gold**

By the time this ended, the final results had also started trickling in. I had quit my company because it made no sense to carry on; things had reached a nadir. SIBM had already come out in February with a straight reject 3 days before my A interview, a result which shocked me. NMIMS followed in mid-march with a lousy rank. IMT-G gave me the feeling that the tide had turned, with a straightforward convert which made me go 'At least I can stop looking for a job now.' MICA came out with an expected ding. Only MDI, the IIMs and IIT Bombay were left.

Then came the stunner in the form of the SC stay on the OBC quota, which was followed by the MHRD directive to stop the results. The following fortnight was agonizing. Every day I spent on

the computer checking out news sites, hoping that something would have happened which would let the results come out quickly. The IMT-G payment date was fast approaching, and at that time there was no AICTE directive preventing institutes from retaining whatever amount they wanted from the first installment in case of cancellation of admission. Having had what seemed like a good interview at MDI, with the added fact that MDI gives a huge weightage to CAT scores, I was expecting a sure-shot convert at least for the IM and HR courses.

However, MDI refused to give any idea about the result dates; and with extreme irritation, I flew to Delhi to pay up at IMT-G ( they then had a system of counseling where you had to turn up in person to pay up). As good as the place is, however, for some intangible reason, I felt that I did not want to go there. There is no reason or logic to it, it was just a strong thought from the moment I reached there. I paid up the first installment, with the bad feeling that I was wasting 30k by doing that. MDI came out within a few days of that, and for the first time I got a feeling that things were going really awry. A straight reject in the main course, and very high waitlist numbers in IM and HR, both highly unlikely to convert, which is what happened. I still managed to calm down as I reckoned that I would convert at least one of the IIMs.

## **Disaster Strikes**

Friday, 27th April 2007 is a day which I will never forget. It was a day which took me to the lowest I had ever been in life, only to be improved upon (worsened?) about 9 months later. The MHRD issued the directive giving the go ahead for the results in the early afternoon. Unlike this year, there was no confusion about its contents, and the IIMs started declaring the results soon. IIM Calcutta came out the first. Dinged.



Half of my prep group made it there, and it felt really bad to miss out. Plus, it had been one of my better interviews and the best GD.

IIM Indore came out next, and for a moment I thought I'd made it. I started celebrating only to realize that I'd been waitlisted, **not selected**. No waitlist number. IIM Kozhikode came out next.

**Dinged.** This was when I felt the first surge of panic, a feeling of sheer helplessness and pure, unadulterated fear. 3 gone. L came out within a few minutes. **Straight reject.** Shit. Panic and fear completely took over. I remember a chat with zanyzaphod then, he said, "Same situation." He'd also got a ding from CLIK, and was hanging on for A. Then, there was a power failure. I started pacing up and down the house, my mind going bonkers over the thought of not getting in anywhere. What would I do? I didn't have a job. What would I do? Why didn't I ever think of a fallback plan? How could I be so stupid? Questions, hundreds of them, without a single answer. The phone rang, it was a friend I'd prepared with for the interviews. They were all sitting in the class we'd done our preparations with, thrilled with their selections, yet feeling bad for me.

"A results are out. You checked?"

"They are? No power here", I replied, my blood pressure quickly doubling.

"Want me to check?"

"No, I'll do it myself when its back."

"Ok."

The A interview went through my mind a hundred times, and I desperately searched for anything remotely positive in it. An hour passed by, and the power failure ended. I switched on the computer with hands trembling wildly out of control. The IIM Ahmedabad site loaded quickly, and there was the link which would make or

break me. I put in my details, as the page turned blank. A single line replaced the empty space,

‘Your name does not figure in the list of selected or waitlisted candidates for PGP 2007-09.’

## **The End?**

The next one hour is blanked out from my memory. I do not remember anything, except for an all-pervasive feeling of hopelessness. I was sitting on the bed when my parents came to console me. After the tears stopped flowing, I uttered my first coherent sentence.

“I am not going to IMT Ghaziabad.”

My parents, of course, realised that this was no moment to argue with me and did not oppose it. They thought reality would seep in and I'd move on. I, however, had not spoken this sentence emotionally. I left the house and went to see my girl friend, and my first sentence was the same. Again, there was no argument. I was clearly being left alone with my thoughts, quite understandably at that.

I had a long talk with prem\_ravi that evening. I had got to know him over the last few months, after we'd got IIM Calls. He himself had got dinged in A, his sole call, and yet he had the heart and magnanimity to console me. He called me that day and almost every single day after that till I was OK. He kept telling me that this was a freak result, that I was much better than this and that I should not give up. I didn't believe him, but listened to him out of politeness. Prem has been my constant source of strength and motivation since then. Thank you, prem bhai, you have no idea how much you've helped. I can't express it in words.

The days moved by as reality started sinking in. Five IIM Calls. Five rejects. How did I manage it? Was I really that bad? Should I just accept what had come my way and consider myself lucky for that? Should I move on? IMT-G was undoubtedly a good place. A thousand thoughts, a thousand doubts, a thousand fears, a thousand 'what-ifs'. Everything I'd planned ahead of this assumed that I'd convert something and take it up. I had plans of marrying and settling down with my girl friend immediately after my MBA. So many stupid plans so long into the future.

The most difficult part was coming to terms with reality and starting the job search. All I had was an engineering degree from a not-at-all famous college and a career path which even the most liberal of people raised their eyebrows at after understanding. I couldn't even submit my resume on job sites properly, their drop down menus and limited choices couldn't explain a career choice like mine. I went all out in my job hunt, emailing and calling up anybody and everybody who didn't positively hate me. When people asked me in casual conversations about what I did, I replied with a frank 'nothing' and made it amply clear that I was looking for a job. After a bit of networking, I got an interview call. For 2 hours, I was ripped apart on mechanical engineering. I had started dreading anything related to mechanical engineering. As expected, I got dinged.

### **No. Once more, I shall fight.**

Then, one fine day, out of the blue, I got a call from a friend. Things moved quickly, and within 3 days, I had a job offer. Best of all, it was in marketing, and in the mechanical field. A perfect way to enter the job market again. The package was ordinary, but I didn't deserve more with the way my career had moved. I was not going to IMT-G. My parents tried a lot to convince me to go for it. A lot of friends were shocked that I was turning down a prestigious college like that. After the job offer, however, I was very clear about what I was going to do. I went into the job with full earnest. June, July and August flew

by as I immersed myself into the job and into CAT preparation. The job was not rigorous time wise, but was challenging otherwise. I enjoyed the experience thoroughly, and was lucky to get a boss who was just about incredible. There's no other word to describe him, really. For a change, life was moving smoothly.

### **Err, didn't mean to fight this way**

September. Got a bomb. My girlfriend wanted a break from me. We had been having problems for a while, and she couldn't take it anymore. Although I was against it, we decided to go on a break for a month. I was heartbroken. I gave up studies and just went through the whole of the month of auto-pilot. As it usually happens in such cases, for some inexplicable reasons, my mock scores went up. I, however, had almost lost all interest and just went with the flow. Life was playing games again with me.

October. After a lot of talking and sorting issues out, we were back. I couldn't have been happier. Life seemed sunny again, and I attacked CAT preparation with a lot of gusto. Along came the much feared slump again, this time a month late. This completely freaked me out. I completely believe in the bell curve theory of performance. IMHO performance also follows the natural cycle of ups and downs and most of the times you cannot do anything about it. Luckily for me, I had worked so hard on Quant that I performed decently in it even during the lean phase. DI, however, was a different ball game. I kept hitting lower lows. I just couldn't attempt more than 10-15 percent of the paper. T.I.M.E., then, decided to push up the level of their DI sections, which did me little good. I kept botching up paper after paper, section after section. Panic set in, again. However, I had last year's experience, and I knew that I needed one good day to get me back in form. As much as I had hoped, IMS' mock SIM in the first week of November did not provide me solace like last year. I screwed up that too. Now all I had was one more mock, and then CAT.

## **Time to get cracking again**

For the nth time in life, my tendency to stay completely calm and in control during crunch situations helped me. I managed to put all the defeats and frustrations of the last few months behind me. After coming out, though, I realised that I might have under-attempted the DI section. Within hours, even before checking my scores, I had a feeling that I'd miss out on ABC this year.

Now, the question was, how accurate had I been in DI? One question here or there and I'd end up with zero IIM Calls. With shaky hands again, I checked my scores that night, expecting the worst. I had completely overrated the Quant section, getting a 51 when the expected cut-offs would be in the low 30s. I had made some horrendous blunders in DI, but a few questions that I'd hurriedly solved in the last few minutes came good. 41. ABC was out, almost definitely. The question was, was it good enough to get at least a lower 90 percentile? 39 in verbal, with 3 different coaching class keys. If these scores were indeed what I ended up with, I reckoned I'd get somewhere around 99.6 to 99.7 overall, with something similar in Quant.

## **Mini D-Day**

December went off in a blur of work. On D-day, 8th January, I had flown down to Delhi for an important presentation. I was nervous as hell. The minutes slowed trickled past. Just as the presentation got over, I got a call. 99.72 overall with 92.31 in DI. Oh, this was going to be tight. Suddenly, it hit me that the IIM Ahmedabad dream was over. Those moments from IIM Ahmedabad went through my mind as I told myself to stop being silly and wait for the rest of the IIMs. I knew I had a good shot at LIK. So many emotions - hope, despair, anxiety, fear passed through my mind as I peered out of the aircraft window at the tiny orange lights distributed randomly below.

I woke up next morning to the beep of my mobile phone. Groggily, I tried to make sense of the words 'Your IIM Calls are LIK'.

### **The game is on again**

This time, I decided to concentrate on the interviews. I was fairly confident of the GDs, and knew that performance in a GD was not as important as the interview. I tried to have as many mock interviews as possible with different people. With each interview, I grew in confidence; I was getting the common feedback that there didn't seem to be anything wrong with my interviews. January passed by quickly. The IIM Interviews were earlier this year; with IIM Lucknow on 9th February, K on 12th and I on 21st.

### **But somebody changed the setting to 'Toughest' when I can't deal with 'Novice'**

'I think we should separate.' 1st February 2008, evening. The one thing I dreaded the most in life had happened. Four hours on the phone, trying to plead, cajole and everything else. Slept past midnight, exhausted after crying my heart out. Woke up at 6 PM the next day; we were going to meet, the 'we need to talk' kind of meet.

Five more hours of intense emotions and heart-wrenching pain. She had had enough of me, after four and a half years. It was my fault, I had goofed up and was paying the price. Again, the rest of the day has blanked out from my memory, other than a mock interview that I gave at T.I.M.E. two hours after the 'talk'. I went in a barely-able-to-prevent-myself-from-not-crying state, all disheveled and in an absolute disaster state. It was the best mock interview of my life. I had never believed I could feel this much pain for so long.

Each second dragged its feet, each action and place brought back memories. The weekend was over, and with it the time I had set aside for some crucial brushing up of academics. Monday morning

brought a new horror, that of having to concentrate on work. The IIM Lucknow interview on Saturday loomed perilously close. I had no idea how I was going to give the interview and what I was going to do. The thought that I'd break down in the middle of the interview horrified me. The week flew by and Friday evening saw me listlessly packing my bag for the next day.

## **Stupid, stupid me**

“Is there anybody without an Admit Card?”

A single hand rose from the last row of the 30 strong group. Me.

“Sorry, we cannot have your process without it.”

A sickening feeling filled me. They were asking me to leave. My sixth IIM Call. Even without an interview.

“Please get it and come back tomorrow. We will have your process tomorrow.”

I almost ran out of the waiting room shamefacedly. How could I forget? I pulled off my tie and threw it in my bag, angry at myself for such a stupid error. Stupid stupid stupid.

I went the next day for formality's sake; I knew they wouldn't pardon stupidity like that. They did assure me that it wouldn't matter during the interview, but I didn't believe it.

IIM Kozhikode. After a few questions on mechanical engineering in which I tackled (or, more appropriately, tried to tackle) graphs and force diagrams. On my venture, the panelists saw my articles in The Hindu. They praised it a few times and said that I could leave, leaving me slightly bewildered.

## **A wild experience**

IIM Indore. A question on economics, which I answered at a very basic level. Not satisfied, he asked me whether he could ask me about history. I shook my head, history was probably my worst area. A little exasperated, he wondered aloud, 'What should I ask you?' I think I must have given an answer which he wouldn't get very often. 'Wildlife', I ventured, a little hesitatingly. 'Huh? I don't know much about that. OK, anyway, let's see what you know.' The interview ended 15 minutes later with the statement and question 'Your interview is over. We are done with grading you. Now for curiosity's sake, why don't you make a career in this field? You are so passionate about it.'

I walked out with a smile on my face, probably after a long, long time.

XLRI-BM, 28th February. The best interview I've ever given, by a long long margin. Last for around half an hour and I came out with a really good feeling.

XLRI-PMIR, 3rd March. The most horrendous GD I have ever been through. I was shaking my head in frustration through most of it. We went off on a tangent, and all attempts to bring the group back were unsuccessful. In the interview, argued with the panelist about a point and stuck to my view. Came out with mixed feelings.

## **Déjà vu?**

Everything, everything was going like last year. Bad interviews. Bad results – had got rejected in SCMHRD after what seemed like a decent interview which had ended a tad too honestly, was asked what other calls I had, and I listed out all of them – LIK, XLRI, MDI. The interview ended soon afterwards.



## **Something to cheer about**

MICA, 19th March. Spent most of the day with Chuck taking in his pearls of wisdom. For a change, the interview went like a dream. Was at the Ahmedabad railway station when Chuck called. His voice was somber. MICA had this system of spot offers and spot rejects which were announced at the end of each day. I had a feeling that I'd got the nasty end of it.

"Dude..." he trailed off.

"Ya?" I said, with trembling hands.

"Your dry run is over. You got a spot offer."

My hands seemed to have a life of their own, as I tried to grasp the meaning of his words. Finally. Oh god, finally!

25th March, evening, after returning from the MDI interviews. XLRI results come out, and before really realizing it, I was out of BM. Straight reject after what had seemed like a great interview. Waitlisted 19 in PMIR, a very likely convert. Great interview, reject. Okayish interview, almost convert. Well, at least I was doing SOMETHING right this year.

## **Oh no, not again!**

10th April, 11 am. SC lifts stay on OBC quota, said the latest news lines picked up by Google news. IIM Ahmedabad confirmed that a delay in the results was likely, as expected. What an anti-climax. A strong feeling of déjà vu came to me. Just give me a different ending, I thought. Please! The same agony, the same frustration, all over again, a year later.

The only positive was that I had something in hand this year. I returned home to find a packet for me from SCMHRD. I had converted it in the end! Including IMT-G this year again, I had a

score of three out of five, with one waitlist. Not bad after last year I went to sleeping dreaming of converting all the remaining calls and wondering where I'd go if that happened. But I had a lot of faith in my abilities (or the lack thereof) in the sense that I was sure that I wouldn't have much difficulty choosing what to do in the end.

### **Times are changing!!!!**

16th April, 5 pm. Monsterkartik called me up. I had misplaced his number and took the call with an irritated 'Yes?'. I'd had a long and tiring day and was in no mood to patiently tell a salesperson that I was not interested in buying a credit card or a home loan or a cow or whatever else they sell.

"Saale, Kartik hoon."

"Ohh. Bol."

"Congrats saale."

Monster has this firm belief that 'saale' is very nice form of greeting people.

"Kisliye?"

"Saale, convert hua aur maloom bhi nahi hai?"

"Tu kya baat kar raha hain?", I asked, not a little irritated at my inability to quickly grasp the situation.'

"You \$#^@#, MDI convert hua hain, saale."

10 mins later, I was sitting with all three MDI course final selection lists open in front of me. Converts. All of them.

30th April, midnight on SB. IIM results were scheduled to be out the next day. SB was unusually quiet. 12.05 am. IIM Bangalore drops a surprise package. Results out. I didn't have a call, so it didn't matter. But it had started. Wild celebrations started as the first of the biggies was out. Then the IIM Indore site started acting up, but nothing really happened. At 2 am, I finally called it a day and went to bed to a restless sleep. So much was at stake tomorrow. Three years of incredible highs and despairing lows, ecstasy and agony. Good, bad, and the ugly. It was like one of those feelings - where your entire life flashes before your eyes. Would I be able to make it, in the end? Or would I come achingly close again and yet be so far away?

1st May, 10 am. IIM Calcutta results had been out. I excitedly went through the thread, looking for user ids I knew. Time trickled by, slowly, agonizingly as PG was refreshed every half a minute.

Suddenly at around 11, a link came up. IIM Kozhikode results. This was it. Shit. The same trembling hands, the same sweaty palms, the same rapid, shallow breathing which I had got so used to by now. I struggled to remember my test registration number, confusing this year's with this year's. Finally, all the data was put in. A click later, the page started loading.

### **Or are they?**

'Sorry. Your name does not figure in the list of selected candidates.'

All the familiar emotions were back, as I struggled to regain control. I had MDI, I reminded myself. The achingly beautiful pictures of the Kozhikode campus teased me from above the 'Sorry...' line. IIM Call number six. Reject. 2 more, and the circus will be over. Just let it happen quickly, I thought. Mercy killing.

Rejected. Rejected. Rejected... And so continued the posts on the

thread. Not a single convert. Someone posted a conversation with the K admissions department ‘We haven’t put up the results yet. Wait for a while.’ Was it possible? Could it happen? Or was I going into the same old loop of hoping when there was no hope?

20 minutes later. Utsavmamoria tells me that his friend has a convert. I refuse to believe it, not wanting to let go of the hope I was hanging on to. Somebody else posts that he has a convert. Shit. It’s true. The results are, indeed, out. I go back to the results link, put in the details, and click,

‘Congratulations Mr. KARANDIKAR HARSHAD HEMANT!. You have been selected for admission...’

**Yes, indeed!!!!**

PS : 4.30 pm : IIM Lucknow Website : ‘Congratulations, .....’

P.P.S : 6.30 pm : IIM Indore Website : ‘Congratulation.....’

P.P.P.S : I cant express in words how much I owe PG and its users. Never for a moment did they let me believe that I didn’t have it me to make it. No sooner did I utter the words ‘I had five calls last year, and got rejected in all’, did I get a retort, ‘Iss saal dekh le, tera sab hone wala hain.’ (Just check out this year, you are going to get all what you want) I used to laugh it off as baseless optimism, but I now realize how important it was for me to keep hearing that. There are countless of them who said this to me; unfortunately my lousy memory prevents me from listing all of them here. To all of them, a huge, huge thanks. Straight from the heart. Haan haan, sirf prem bhai ko senti marne ka license nahi hai (prem isn’t the only one who has the license to be sentimental).

Of course, I wouldn’t have been here without my parents who let me do things my way, and my ex-girlfriend, who respected my choices

The Best of All I wanted to speak about CAT - 2010 Edition

and gave me the freedom and support to pursue my dreams. Ok, this is beginning to sound too much like an Oscar speech, so I'll chuck it here.

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# **Mahesh Chayel**

## **Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta**

### **Class of 2008-10**

**Scored 99.46 percentile in CAT 2007**

Finally the day has come when I am getting a chance to write in this thread. This thread is revered as the most sacred thread on PG. It has been inspiration to thousands including me and now it feels just too good to explain. Like how Sehwag would have felt playing with Sachin, Sachin would have felt on meeting Bradman.

#### **The story begins**

The thought of doing higher studies came to my mind in my college. The aim was to prove to myself that I was better than what I am currently doing. The time when I joined my college IT industry was at its bottom in 2001. The thoughts of not getting a job and being a burden on my parents used to disturb me. The limelight given to IIM students attracted me also. I knew it wasn't easy but also knew that every good thing is not easy.

I was prepared to put in the hard work. I was ready for sacrifices. And I did those, in terms of putting in hours of study on CAT material starting from April 2005.

I stopped playing in those cricket games, missed those parties and preferred to stay at my place so that I can get some extra time. I did not want to lose my grades because I thought I might face problems in the IIM Interviews because I didn't have work-experience. At the

same time didn't want to risk the placements. Those were the real hectic times. But CAT preparation helped a lot in my placements, everytime I used to beat the best in the placements, though my interviews didn't go that well. CTS (Cognizant Technology Solutions) was the first company and Oracle was finally where I joined.

In the meanwhile, the mocks before CAT 2005 seemed to go well. I used to score well 97 to 99.5 percentiles in CL mocks. On the CAT day, I was all prepared. I was sure that I will get in and clear it. There was a little surprise to see differential markings and then those two and half hours just sailed. I was worried about my English and little bit about Quant. And finally when the results came, I saw 98.2 percentile with an 86.5 in Quant. VA was 95.3 and DI 98.7. I was lost, felt like breaking somebody's jaw.

Then I was little settling down when all of a sudden I get an MDI call letter sent to my house. I never checked the MDI results on site. The interview was 15 days later at IIM Bangalore. I thought of skipping this first, but then went in after some compulsion. The best part of the whole experience was the IIM campus. I knew if I had to do MBA its IIMs. But still attended MDI interview and then didn't check results for long and later one day I found the reject. The learning I got from there was that if I can have a good work-experience it will be even better for me while doing MBA. This sets the tone for next year.

### **The story repeats**

I analyzed those failures a lot. Went to various sites and read people experiences. Read about what use an MBA would be. In the meanwhile I was introduced to PG by my friend Kannan (mirchikris on PG). For me, it is still the best place to discuss anything. But what I learnt was the dedication with which some of the senior guys in PG were posting. Pys like prem\_ravi, amitnitsian and UDT and DT

members of 2006 were really doing awesome work. This year I was fully learning on my work and trying to involve in PG offline activities.

Wrote CAT again, got a meager 95 percentile with a very bad percentile in VA, around 70. Other two were above 95. But I wasn't expecting much. This year brought out a different person in me. I felt like those professors were right. I could understand the value of work-experience. Things which I couldn't have learned in college.

## **The epitome**

The final part of my journey started after I read through the experiences of people on the UDT thread. The feeling of losing and succeeding was awesome. I could feel it. I decided that I will be part of UDT and succeed this year no matter what happens. Didn't want to leave any stone unturned, so joined the full-time T.I.M.E. course. Got acquainted with a lot of friends there. First met prem\_ravi, vijay317 and sundarrajan during those classes.

But the greatest impetus was provided by my first PG meet. Guys like anarchy, oxymoron and profootball were really motivating. That was the first time I felt dreams can turn reality. And then on my first aim was to keep remaining motivated for doing well. Some of us used to have weekly meets after that. Nearly for months me, harshaamrutesh666, the\_wraith, RISING, contender and Ravi rocks, (don't remember his PG id) used to meet and discuss various stuff including studies. Esh.nil, my colleague also was part of this CAT journey and used to solve some great Quant problems and teach me few tricks sometimes.

Then the mocks started and there was not much time for meets during every weekend though we used to meet often. Then started the sinusoidal waves in mocks. There used to be ups and downs. The scores used to rise for sometime continuously and then fall



continuously; lot of analysis can be done on that. Side by side I joined CL mocks also but attended only around half of them. Evening mocks can be real sleepy.

Around this time the UDT for 2007 was formed. I intended to join this as you read earlier. Thankfully the judges gave me a chance and that was the first hint of hope that I can make it. The motivation provided on this thread is very rare to find. Though BBLT and DT were also equally good, but I wanted to be in the UDT only. Came across brilliant people here like krsh.vik, Greenspan, Anir\_iim2005, cimbaish\_nitin, somname, rjt163, the\_phantom, harshadk and veritas here. It was great learning from these guys.

The most difficult part was October and November when I felt that I knew most of the stuff still my scores weren't that good. I used to regularly chat with people as to what to do. But nothing improved. The last mock which I wrote was T.I.M.E. AIMCAT-2, which was two weeks before the CAT. And in this I touched my lowest score at 78 percentile. I read few things after that but never got the courage to take the full mock.

## **The day before CAT**

I decided that if I had prepared enough I need not worry. I had given my maximum this time and even if this year I don't get through I will quit CAT. Then the only thing that came to my mind is why I was thinking like a loser before fighting. I geared up and started thinking that I will crack it. Thoughts like beating DT members also came to my mind. And finally I decided, I will write CAT as though I am good enough to get into any college. Good enough to score more than any person.

## **The day of CAT**

It was like a normal day. I got dressed in my usual dress for mocks, same set of slippers, pen, pencils and watch. I used to have lot of pencils by the way. By the time I was writing CAT, I had 22 pencils, 6 erasers and 4 sharpeners.

Luckily got the same centre for CAT where I used to write mocks. So, it was quite easy. No distractions in front of me this time. So, started on a happy note and didn't think about anything else during the exam. It was like done in ten minutes. Never felt the time passing by. Then, while coming out I thought that a season of speculations is going to start and I don't want to be a part of that. So, just discussed some Quant questions with Prem, did not discuss anything else. In the evening, after lot of persistence from anir\_jim, I told the options I marked in verbal. The verdict was that I was just getting two out of 15 correct. That's it, I closed the paper and put it below the 100s of mock papers I had and vowed not to touch it till the results.

So, free from all this speculation I enjoyed the time before CAT results. There was a shocker on the day of CAT results, I was refreshing from morning for the results which were supposed to come at 3 PM.

And the results were too good for my expectations.

I got 99.46, with all sections above 95. Especially 97.97 in VA. And as it says at the bottom of the page, calls from B C L I K.

Then started a journey of a totally different sense, I had to know myself. It was easy saying this, but it was quite hard to understand how to do this. Apart from that, there was need to be familiar with all the general topics. GD/PI classes were a lot helpful. Especially the two day camps organized by coaching institutes. What I learnt from there was that every person might be good, have some great skills. But what matters is how he is able to present those things in front of

everybody. IIMs need good people who are intellectuals, not some bonds. But one thing was clear that there are lot of nice people at this stage and competition is tough.

Slowly, each GDPI passed and I got good to average GDs and average to bad PIs. Again wasn't expecting much overall, but then used to think whether even one of the IIMs will find me good enough to be a part of their college. The wait for the results was even prolonged by the quota issue. I read each of those 270 pages and 2700 posts on that thread.

And finally on the day of results I was travelling in a bus, when B announced the results. Went home and saw the result. Reject. It seemed like under a weight of 1000 tons. I thought B was my best chance. But B didn't think so.

2 hours later C results came and those 2 hours were one of the longest 2 hours of my life. C said "Congratulations" and the party began. Didn't check any other result.

Later in evening my brother told that I converted L, I and also K.

Now here, I am not saying that I faced a lot of hardships while preparing. But I feel I did which was once considered impossible by me and people who knew me. It was this feeling of achievement which I have attained.

Another thing which I would like to tell is that the preparation of CAT is no less than writing CAT and succeeding. Enjoy the process then you can really perform your best and even if you are not able to, you would still have a feeling that you got some great friends.

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

# **Madhav Nayak**

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**Scored 99.34 percentile in CAT 2004.**

### **Lessons on the road to B-School**

First things first, a clarification: this isn't an attempt at a "how-to" guide for MBA preparation – no one, least of all yours truly, would be in a position to come up with such a generic tips-n-tricks handbook. Neither is this intended to be some sort of inspirational "gyaan" – there are plenty of been-there-cracked-that seniors, instructors, well-wishers and more experienced CAT-takers ;- ) who could be applied to for that.

This is just a simple and honest chronicle of the months and weeks before and after I took CAT, appeared for interviews at four b-schools and finally managed to secure an admission. Encapsulating the entire experience and all that I've learnt from it, in just a few paragraphs isn't easy – but given that I wouldn't want this piece to substitute for sleeping pills, I've made a conscious attempt at space control. Part 1 deals with the first half of the battle – the written exam: CAT. The second part will be dedicated to the next round – the group discussions and interviews.

## **CAT or GRE?**

This is unarguably the number one dilemma most third year engineering students are faced with. Take GRE, stay tech-focused and hop continents; or take CAT, wave pleasant good byes to engineering and jostle for space with a billion others right here in India. Decisions are often governed by many factors other than just interest and aptitude – the latest IIM Ahmedabad foreign salary reported in the previous day’s newspaper, the US software job situation, the MS funding scenario, the ‘is MBA better with work-ex?’ argument and so on. Happily for me, the choice wasn’t all that difficult – after the phenomenal amount I’d been learning in college from the most outstanding faculty in a top-of-the-line engineering institute, I could think of nothing but taking CAT!

## **Getting off the blocks**

“Six months of preparation, two hours a day, is sufficient to crack CAT”. Needless to say this wisdom came from a leading coaching class. I wouldn’t say they’re wrong, but I’m uncomfortable with the generality of the claim. One size never fits all – there are many individual factors which should determine how much time you need to put in for CAT. I always had it at the back of my mind that CAT and my seventh semester exams would most likely clash, and felt more comfortable budgeting more than the conventional six to eight months. When the great Mumbai University announced two final semester exams on either side of November 21st (CAT day), I felt relieved I’d given myself the extra time allowance.

Lesson: 150,000 people may take CAT every year but there’s no need to match your preparation schedule with the other 149,999!

## **Down to the Nuts and Bolts**

Goal setting, self discovery, visualizing yourself treading the corridors of Blah Blah Institute of Management, the first few weeks

at any coaching class is likely to be full of such “inspirational” sessions. I’m sure these pedagogical techniques have some sound theoretical foundation, but personally I found them to be a waste. To a certain extent succeeding in CAT is about self belief and motivation, but isn’t that the case with everything? It’s far more important I’d say to get cracking with the nuts and bolts of the exam: Quant, English and DI.

Lesson: Cut through the hype and hoopla surrounding CAT. You don’t have to be a Zig Ziglar to achieve a decent score (and by the way, neither do you need to be a Shakuntala Devi!)

### **QED: Quant, English and DI!**

The first rule of CAT preparation, I was told, is that all sections of the test are equally important. There’s nothing to be achieved by cracking two sections and goofing up one. There is perhaps enough evidence now to cast serious doubts on the credibility of this conventional wisdom, but nevertheless it’s a useful thumb rule to follow. I didn’t find anything a huge struggle but wasn’t particularly extraordinary in any one section either (even my final result pretty much indicated that!).

Quantitative Ability: They say all engineers are good at Maths. I’d like to stick my neck out and say that “they” have got it wrong! At most, there’s no discomfort with numbers because of constant exposure to them but an engineering degree certainly doesn’t inculcate any special numerical powers. My personal quant barometer fluctuated through my preparation quite dramatically – initially I found the going good, then I hit rock bottom once the practice tests began, only to recover towards the end (and thankfully on d-day!).

English/Verbal Ability: Probably my most comfortable area, the only “advice” I’d give anybody is: READ. I’m more of a newspapers and

magazines guy, but I made an effort to lay my hands on different types of books. Apart from being the best way to tackle RCs, I think reading is a great vocabulary builder – any day preferable to mugging enormous word lists.

**Data Interpretation:** DI is perhaps the trickiest section of CAT. Unlike the other two sections, no one generally ranks DI as their biggest strength or biggest weakness. I was never particularly fond of the number crunching caselets, so I looked to score in the analytical reasoning questions. As it happened, CAT eventually delivered something which fell somewhere in between these two categories and left me quite stumped!

**Lesson:** Don't assume you are good or bad at anything. Solid practice is far more important than believing your aptitude or background will see you through.

## **The Mock Tests**

Practice tests are undoubtedly the most important phase of CAT preparation. They give you a feel of the real thing and highlight weak areas much faster than any amount of non-test practice can do. The first thing the mocks did for me is show me the Quant mirror – cut-offs of 10 marks out of 50 were hard to achieve and this was demoralizing to say the very least. All I can say is that I'm glad I persevered even after those pretty severe setbacks. But it's not just about hanging in there – it's about improving! That's where the importance of analyzing tests once they're done cannot be over-emphasized. Most analyses lead to the irritating, but at the same time encouraging, observation that more than a dozen easy questions exist in every section but have missed one's kind attention. Perfecting the art of sitter spotting is the key, I would say, to scoring well in CAT.

**Lesson:** Use the mocks wisely. Use them to discover strengths and weaknesses and to formulate a strategy for the big day. Many people fret about the second decimal places of their mock test percentiles,

this is pretty pointless if not accompanied by some serious introspection.

### **Leading up to D-Day**

The most stressful part of the entire preparation for me was the time just before CAT. Much to the exasperation of the student community, University exams had been announced to coincide beautifully with CAT. And preceding them was the usual rigmarole of submissions, class tests and vivas. There was little time now to go through new topics (Permutations & Combinations being the first casualty!!) and the Mocks and home tests were all that I could manage. The only time I could seriously relax was the day before D-Day, when – at the cost of my Advanced Microprocessors paper two days later – I decided to hang up my boots and watch some TV!

Lesson: It's ideal to finish off exam prep well in advance so that CAT can hold prime importance in November. But having spent four years in engineering college, I can safely say this is IMPOSSIBLE! So there is no real option but multi-tasking – the most important of those tasks being praying!

### **And then it was done**

The paper was a shocker – weighted marking for the first time ever in CAT, 123 questions for the first time ever in CAT, sub-sections for the first time ever in CAT, DI with no “conventional” DI, yikes! My first thought on seeing the paper was: CAT 2005. My next thought, two hours and 60-odd attempts later, was: CAT 2005.

Lesson: Never expect anything from CAT, except a frequent change of stripes!



## **Results and Missed Calls**

The time I logged into the CAT results web site of one of the IIMs, was the first of many tense moments of the last six months. I found that a number was now associated with my name: 99.34 percentile. Actually, there were three other numbers as well – Quant: 98.9, DI: 94.58, Verbal: 97.31. The initially feeling was one of ecstasy – I had, after all, outperformed my mock CAT scores! The next morning though, was like being yanked from the clouds right into a rabbit hole. One after the other, five hallowed Indian Institutes of Management flashed a rather impolite “Sorry, you have not been shortlisted for GD/PI” message. Only IIM Calcutta, for some reason, deemed me fit for the next round of their selection process.

Lesson: Two consecutive days are capable of delivering two absolutely opposing emotions!

### **But the others came a-calling!**

After the five missed calls (or would “wrong numbers” be more appropriate?), there was plenty of “why didn’t I make it” analysis. Actually, to be honest, it was more like “why the &#\$% didn’t I make it”! Each time I almost managed to convince myself that my DI score did me in, I’d come across people with lower DIs and Ahmedabad calls! And then there were lower verbals and Indore/Kozhikode calls and lower everything and Bangalore calls!!

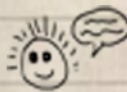
Thankfully, things just looked up from there on. I got calls from all the other institutes I had applied to: SP Jain Mumbai, MDI Gurgaon and NITIE Mumbai. Things were now really looking up, it was time to shoot out of gloom and begin preparation in right earnest for the four interviews I was shortlisted for!

→ [Back to Table of Contents](#)

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## About PaGaLGuY

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Today the PaGaLGuY.com online community boasts of active members who have made it to the Indian Institute of Management (IIMs), XLRI-Jamshedpur, FMS-Delhi, SP Jain and other top BSchools in India, as well as BSchools abroad including Wharton, Harvard, Stanford, Oxford, Duke-Fuqua, Chicago GSB and many others!