



Main Idea Mastery

Practice for the MCAT CARS Section

The CARS section isn't trying to test you on your ability to remember a bunch of random details. The test-makers want you to be able to read a passage and figure out the *main idea*.

Here are a few examples of actual questions from AAMC practice material that show you what I'm talking about:

"Implicit in the passage is the assumption that: ..."

"For which of the following conclusions does the passage offer the most support?"

"What is the main idea of the passage?"

Look at that last one. They're literally just asking for the main idea!

You need to master the ability to read a passage and extract the main idea. Don't get weighed down by every little detail. You need to be able to synthesize the whole passage (and each paragraph) into a coherent picture.

But if you aren't good at this, it can be pretty frustrating. In fact, for most people it's the hardest part of the MCAT to improve.

But it absolutely is possible to get better at extracting the main idea.

Doing AAMC practice passages is the best way to improve, but sometimes you need extra, focused practice.

I'm going to show you a simple technique you can use to give your "main idea" skills a boost.

How it works

Step one: Find some good reading material

You want to find some reading material that's comparable to MCAT passages. Articles from places like [Aeon](#), [The Atlantic](#), or [The Economist](#) are my favorite. Typically you want to go for articles that are about the same length as CARS passages.

Step two: Read it

Read whatever article you picked out. Try to read at about the same pace you would for the MCAT.

Step three: Summarize

As you go through the article, write a one sentence summary for each paragraph. Make your summary as short as possible!

Then, when you finish the article write a one to two sentence summary of the entire article.

For example, here are my first three paragraph summaries for [this article from Aeon](#):

Paragraph 1 – The history of Easter Island is greatly debated, especially because of the statues.

Paragraph 2 – One side says the island collapsed from exploitation of resources, but the other side calls this a myth.

Paragraph 3 – Overpopulation and agricultural practices depleted natural resources, leading to collapse.

When you're writing your summaries, think like this: imagine that you're trying to explain the key points of an article to a friend. But your friend has a short attention span, so you have to pack the most information into the least space possible.

Step four: Check your work

Ideally, this works best if you have a study partner who you can compare notes with. That way you make sure that you're really getting the main idea.

Part of what I do with students is review their work on main idea exercises to make sure they're on the right track.

A Few Final Thoughts

This is a very simple technique. But don't be deceived. If you practice this regularly, you'll see your skills jump up.

And that will be a *huge* benefit to you on the CARS section and the rest of the MCAT.

Want to take your CARS skills to the next level?

I offer one-on-one tutoring for CARS. I do all sessions online, so you can connect from anywhere. Plus, I start everybody off with a free hour of tutoring (no commitment).

Send me an email at contact@premedstrategy.com to get more details.