

Getting the best out of the AIMCATs

Posted on [March 27, 2018](#) by [admin](#)

By now, you would have appeared for a few All India Mock CATs (AIMCATs) – and probably got results which are less than what you would hope for. If that's the case, then you would most probably be asking yourself a simple question: "How do I really improve my performance in the AIMCATs?" or "How can I move from almost clearing the cut-offs to consistently making it to the toppers list?"

The key to making this possible lies in how much you can extract from the AIMCATs that you are taking. The AIMCATs are undoubtedly one of the most valuable tools you have to help fine-tune your performance. It is most widely acknowledged that the AIMCAT series is as close to the real thing as is possible – in terms of the quality of the paper, the crowd taking the test, the results and the accompanying analysis. However, you can make all of that work for you only if you are really prepared to put in what it takes to extract the maximum out of each AIMCAT.

This article is intended to help you in doing exactly that, i.e., in getting the most out of each and every AIMCAT that you take, so that you can move ahead in your endeavor to score high in the AIMCATs and subsequently in the CAT itself.

Perspective

The first aspect that we shall consider is your perspective on the AIMCATs. In order to gain the most out of the AIMCATs you need to have the right perspective about what they are intended to be and how they can help you.

Firstly, the AIMCATs are intended to be a benchmarking tool, i.e., to help you measure the level of your preparedness for the actual CAT and discover your strong and weak areas. They are definitely not intended to scare or discourage you and therefore you should never treat them with fear.

Secondly, the AIMCATs are also designed to help you develop the right test-taking approach/strategy for the real CAT through a proper analysis of your performance in each AIMCAT. In short, practice makes for perfection.

Finally, the AIMCATs are also intended to help you actually learn some advanced techniques, i.e., you may sometimes find new and better ways of applying basic concepts.

Before and during each AIMCAT, you should consider it as if it were the actual CAT itself and believe that your performance

in the AIMCAT actually matters. Without such seriousness you cannot hope to either perform well in the AIMCATs or to gain any serious benefit from them.

However, it is very important that every time you take an AIMCAT, you need to look at the overall test-taking experience not just as giving a mock-CAT but as an opportunity to learn and improve your performance.

Also, do not miss out on any AIMCAT unless it is absolutely unavoidable. And finally, though you take each AIMCAT seriously – as if it were the actual CAT itself – remember to take the results with a pinch of salt, especially on those occasions when they are not up to your expectations! In short, always give your best shot at it but never let it get to you.

Preparation and Practice

The next aspect that matters is your preparation, which primarily includes practice. Remember that, over the past few years, with increasing amount of time available per question in each section, the CAT has been placing increasingly greater emphasis on conceptual clarity and the sheer ability to tackle a question and solve it, when compared to resorting to shortcuts, speed, selection of questions, etc.

Therefore, for each AIMCAT, you need to be completely up-to date with the basics of the topics, which you would have already covered in class till then.

If your preparation is lagging or is below par currently, then you should immediately plan for a complete round-up of the syllabus within a set timeframe so that you have at least a couple of months to go before the CAT for fine-tuning your performance.

The Online Sectional Tests (OSTs), available on the Student Home Page on www.time4education.com, should be used to top-up your preparation through extensive and high-quality practice.

Performance

The third aspect you need to understand is your performance in the AIMCATs. The three most important things to look out for here are time management, selection of questions, and accuracy. Firstly, time management is all about planning your available time so that you can display your proficiency to the fullest, while maximizing your score, making the best use of the time available, without being forced to leave any question unread. The issue of time management, generally speaking, involves two levels: across sections and within a section.

In fact, with the sectional time limits in place, the issue of time management across sections is automatically resolved and, thankfully, you need to focus on only the issue of managing your time within each section. Time management within a section mainly calls for self-discipline in ensuring that you never spend an inordinate amount of time on any question and judiciously move away from questions that turn out to be more time-consuming than expected. With 32-34 questions and about 60 minutes per section, the time available per question is comfortably adequate. This makes the selection of questions to be attempted definitely easier but not any less important.

Also, you would have noted that in any AIMCAT the order in which the sections appear is fixed, i.e., VARC first, DILR second and then QA. This is since the order in which the sections appear is the same as in the CAT. Therefore the order in which you can attempt the sections is fixed and you cannot navigate to any section of your choice. This means that you must, through practice and careful planning, get accustomed to the given order of attempting the sections irrespective of your strong/weak sections.

A tried and tested approach to optimum utilisation of your time in any section is to first invest about 5–6 minutes in rapidly scanning through all the questions in the section and classifying the questions as easy, moderate and difficult, based on your judgment of if and when you should attempt them during the time spent in the section. The ‘easy’ questions should be attempted first, ensuring a decent amount of time still left in the section. After this, you should move on to the ‘moderate’ ones and attempt as many of them as time permits. Later, if you actually have some time left, you may consider the difficult ones too. One important thing to bear in mind throughout is that you should consciously avoid spending undue amount of time on any single question, which most often involves resisting the urge – especially if you consider yourself to be very good at any subject – to pursue any challenging question till you crack it.

It would help to plan for a buffer time of 5 to 10 minutes in each section, to review or attempt some of the unattempted questions, and also tackle any unexpected issues, like mismanagement of time, that

may crop up while attempting the section. Spending time on the 'wrong' or a more difficult question than is required can, in fact, prove to be a costly mistake, since even one opportunity lost at answering another easier question correctly would mean about a three percent (3%) decrease in the maximum possible score in that section, resulting in a high impact on your percentile per question answered correctly or incorrectly.

The art of selecting the right questions to attempt comes from a combination of a solid grounding in the basics and an ability to quickly see through the situation given in the question and also visualise the broad steps involved in the solution. This inevitably requires considerable amount of practice, both during mock tests and individual study.

Finally, the accuracy of your attempts in the AIMCAT needs to be taken care of. For the same reasons as explained above, any sort of compromise on accuracy, can lead to a drastic reduction in your percentile score. Hence, an accuracy of 85 per cent or more is strongly recommended.

Performance and Analysis

The fourth aspect that needs to be considered is the analysis of your performance in the AIMCAT (i.e., after you have attempted it). After each AIMCAT, spend at least two to three hours in analysing each section of the paper. This is undoubtedly the most enriching experience that you can extract out of the AIMCATs.

You should first try to work out each and every question in as many different ways as you can think of and only then look up the solutions. It is in this phase of your preparation that you can expect to significantly improve your understanding of the basics and more importantly, your ability to apply them in an exam scenario. This analysis should be done in different steps.

In step one, attempt all those questions in that section that you had left unattempted during the AIMCAT, by giving yourself a limited amount of time, which can be decided on a pro-rata basis, depending on your speed in the actual test and the number of questions left unattempted.

After this step, try to solve questions that may still be left over. Here, you would most probably need considerable amount of time since the questions are bound to be the more difficult ones. Only after giving all the questions a good try, check the answer key to find out which questions you could answer correctly and re-attempt all those questions that you answered incorrectly. You would be able to learn a great deal through this approach since you would actually be pushing yourself to think harder and find out where you have made mistakes. Do not refer to the solutions until you are finished with this step.

After this, you can refer to the solutions and compare your approach with that given in the solutions. You should keenly observe and learn anything new that you may find in the solutions. Also, ensure that you approach your faculty for clarifying any doubts that you may still have regarding the solutions or the questions themselves. At the end of this stage of your analysis, you should try to categorise the questions into levels of difficulty based on the amount of time that you would take to solve each of them in an exam situation. This is a very important step that will help you in identifying the difficulty level of a question in an AIMCAT, and eventually in the actual CAT – a critical input required when trying to choose the right questions to attempt during a test.

Another important part of your post AIMCAT analysis, is to carefully look up the extensive analysis – Section-wise, Area-wise, Difficulty Level-wise and much more – that is provided on the Student Home Page along with the results of each AIMCAT.

The AIMCAT results and analysis, available on www.time4education.com, are meticulously designed, comprehensive, and personalised analyses that are intended to give you valuable feedback on your

performance. This feedback will guide you toward better, more focused and effective preparation and can set you on a path of continuous improvement.

Another practical way to boost your learning is to sometimes study, if possible, with your peers in small groups of not more than three to four members. You can analyse and discuss each AIMCAT as a group, after each member is through with their part of individual analysis. This is a very good approach to maximise your learning. The group should ideally be formed with members with strengths in different areas so that there is scope for everyone to gain from the joint effort.

Progress

One critical aspect that often gets neglected is keeping track of one's progress in the AIMCATs. You should continually keep checking your performance parameters.

The key performance parameters are your sectional and overall percentile scores. Remember that absolute scores do not necessarily reflect your performance since it is a competitive exam, where only relative performance matters.

You should actively keep track of how often you cross the sectional cutoffs and also the times that you make it to the toppers list or how often you cross a certain overall percentile figure that you may be aiming for.

Observe any trends, like a steady improvement or stagnation in any one section, and try to remedy any issues that may need attention. Failing to keep track of and continually adjust your performance and preparation can seriously undermine your preparation.

Also, setting short term and long term goals for your sectional and overall percentiles, and other parameters, like identifying and attempting all the easy questions in a section, is strongly suggested since such short-term targets will keep you focused and motivated.

Perseverance

On a final note, never forget the principle of perseverance. Know and remember that the competition is bound to intimidate you on more than one occasion over the coming months and things will not always go the way you want. Also, be prepared for occasional spells of self-doubt, despair and discouragement – they are all part and parcel of the game – which you will eventually become accustomed to, overcome and, hopefully, use as stepping stones to scale up your preparation and performance in the AIMCATs and also your career in the long run.

Let me conclude with the famous lines of the song 'Sunscreen' by Baz Luhrmann: "Sometimes you're ahead, sometimes you're behind...the race is long, and in the end, it's only with yourself."

Best wishes!

How to ace Group Discussions

Posted on [May 25, 2017](#) by [shahana Roy](#)

The Group Discussion/Written Assessment/Personal Interview (GWPI) stages have today become a regular feature of the selection process of most business schools (as well as for many other professional courses and jobs). Students who are aspiring for a managerial career and aim to secure admission in a good business school must not only prepare for the written test, but also for the GWPI.

Why do b-schools test candidates through GWPI?

People management and communication skills are seen as extremely important assets for a future manager/business leader (not to mention in practically every professional field). While the written tests like the CAT, XAT, and SNAPTest, evaluate the candidate's quantitative, reasoning, verbal ability skills and general awareness (what we can term as 'hard' skills), the GWPI evaluate the candidate's ability to handle himself in a group and to communicate properly (what we can term as 'soft' skills). Both these 'hard' and 'soft' skills are, therefore, evaluated because they are much needed by the candidate, first to successfully complete the MBA course in any good b-school, and later in her/his professional career.

The term 'soft' should not be interpreted as easy; it is not easy to develop these skills, although some students have a natural flair for them. Soft here just means they are intangible and subjective. The GWPI needs as much systematic preparation as the written test.

To repeat, the GWPI is a common selection process for b-school admissions, campus recruitments, and admissions to other professional courses as well.

Relevance in B-Schools

In most top-rated b-schools, the pedagogy heavily involves group activities. It also involves submitting detailed analytical reports on case studies (simulated business problems) and other management related topics. The GWPI tests the suitability of the candidate to be able to withstand the rigours of the curriculum at a top b-school.

Relevance in careereer

In modern progressive organizations, most managers/leaders work with a team of people from diverse backgrounds. Strong people management and communication skills are today considered to be the foundations of a successful growth-oriented organization. The manager/leader should have the ability to analyse the given data and come up with a detailed analysis expressed with clarity. In short, the GWPI tests the suitability of the candidate to be able to cope with the rigours of a future managerial/leadership role.

When should I start preparing for GWPI?

A lot depends on the candidate's background. Each candidate will be at a different level of initial preparedness and, therefore, will require a different period of time to develop the requisite skills and knowledge. Generally, it is recommended that the GWPI preparation is started along with the written test preparation (that, for most serious candidates, begins around six months–1.5 years before the written exam).

In the first part of the two-part article, I will focus on Group Discussion.

Group Discussion (GD)

In a GD round, a group of candidates, generally between eight and 15, are grouped together. They are given a topic for discussion amongst themselves. The moderator evaluates the verbal and non-verbal communication of each candidate. Most b-schools give each candidate certain marks in the GD based on her/his performance. These marks are then used in the calculation of the weighted-average composite score of each candidate.

Normally, a GD lasts between 10-30 minutes; till the time the moderator asks the candidates to stop the discussion. In this period, each candidate must try to make as many relevant and distinct points relating to her/his analysis of the topic as possible. In addition, he/she must also listen attentively to the ideas of the other candidates, and try to bring the group together towards a coherent discussion.

In this sense, the participant has different roles to perform – initiator (who provides fresh points and fresh perspectives), coordinator (who tries to control the flow of the discussion in a smooth, non-chaotic manner), analyser (who tries to draw certain conclusions from the points), interrogator (who questions the strength of the ideas of the candidates), fact-provider (who gives concrete facts/figures about the topic), leader (who does a bit of everything, including motivating the group to have a productive discussion which doesn't descend into chaos).

Types of GDs

(a) Topic-based

(a) A topic related to general knowledge (economics/social/politics/culture/technology). Example: Higher education should be completely privatised.

(b) A topic related to abstract issues can be given. Example: White cannot exist if there's no black..

(b) Case study-based

A case sheet with a small story/problem situation may be given. Example: Dilemma of a loyal clerk who discovers that his boss, to whom he owes a lot, is involved in corruption.

(c) Article-based

A newspaper/magazine extract may be given. Example: An editorial on the vegetarianism versus non-vegetarianism debate.

Sometimes, the moderator may ask each candidate to introduce herself/himself to the group. The moderator may also ask one or more candidates, at the end of the discussion, to conclude or summarise the discussion. It has also become common for the moderator to ask each candidate to additionally prepare a short essay on the given topic.

Evaluation Parameters (in order of importance)

(a) Content

The first and foremost thing tested is the content that the candidate speaks. You should try to give facts, figures (though not excessively) and relevant examples.

(b) Analytical skills

The GD round does not just require the candidates to recite facts, but also analyse the topic through different viewpoints and try to lead the discussion to a logical conclusion. The participant needs to show her/his ability to analyse the topic from different perspectives, logically extending the points of other people, and posing logical questions in the group. These skills are particularly important in a case-study based GD.

(c) Communication (Verbal)

There is no point in having a lot of content if one is unable to properly convey it. Thus the candidate's ability to convey her/his message in a clear and succinct manner, the fluency of her/his communication and her/his choice of words and expressions are tested.

(d) Communication (Non Verbal)

It is true that fellow candidates in the GD will also pick up non-verbal cues from your communication. You should show enthusiasm and positive body language during the discussion.

Preparation Tips

(a) Build up knowledge base by extensive reading.

1. Read at least one good English newspaper on a regular basis. The front page, international news and business section will help in building knowledge about current affairs while the editorials will help you in developing analytical and communication skills.
2. Read good weekly/monthly magazines on current affairs.
- iii. Yearbooks are a good method of recapping the important news of the previous year.
1. **MBA Education & Careers**, i.e., the magazine in your hands, should be read religiously.
2. Some books on modern Indian/international history or general studies books for civil services examinations will be useful in building perspectives.
3. Watch good news debates on television/internet.
- vii. Take one topic from the daily newspaper every day. Try to analyse the topic and jot down at least 10-15 points related to the topic.
- viii. Maintain a notebook/word file in which you note important social/economic/political/science/culture related ideas and statistics from what you observe in the newspapers. Update these notes and revise them regularly.

It is important to note that even for abstract topics, familiarity with a wide range of GK and current affairs will help generate suitable examples and logical analyses.

(b) Develop communication skills

1. Read aloud one article (from the newspaper) daily. Practice in front of a mirror or a friend.
2. Take every opportunity to speak in English, even if it's just casual conversation.
- iii. Do not worry if your fluency in English or vocabulary is not excellent. The GD does not require you to be either verbose or use exotic words. Simple clear language is all that's needed.
1. Practice mock GDs with those friends who might also be preparing for MBA as much as possible.
2. Most importantly, stay confident. Do not become diffident just because others can speak louder/interrupt you in the discussion or because you are an introvert or because your points are already spoken by someone else. In a 15- minute discussion, there will be many opportunities where you can showcase your abilities. But you must not give up on yourself!

(c) Develop logical ability

Generate as many logical points as possible about the topic. Some tools that can be used for these are:

(a) KWA – Key Word Approach. Try to generate points about each of the key words of the topic.

(b) VAP – Viewpoint of Affected Parties. Try to look at the topic from different perspectives of people/groups affected by the issue.

Example: The odd-even vehicular policy in Delhi should be made pan-India. You could discuss the views of car manufacturers, commuters of public transport and cabs, non-commuters, special groups, police, government, and environmentalists.

(c) SPELT – Social, Political, Economic, Legal, Technological angles to the given topic. Each of these aspects of the topic can be analysed wherever relevant.

A variation of the GD is the Group Exercise (GE). GE is generally preferred by b-schools like SCMHRD and MICA. Instead of being given a topic to discuss, the group is given a task to perform together. The moderator observes and evaluates the role played by each candidate in the completion of the task. For Group Exercises, preparation tips (b) and (c) mentioned above will be useful.

WAT & GD Topics

Posted on [April 3, 2018](#) by [admin](#)

We have selected a diverse list of topics for Written Ability Test (WAT, also called essay-writing) and Group Discussion (GD) administered in the recent past at some of India's leading b-schools.

Written Ability Test (WAT) topics

- Will GST transform India's economic landscape? (IIFT)
- The Ninth Schedule of the Constitution of India is against the basic nature of democracy. (IIM Kozhikode)
- Some investors have noted that angel investors must invest in startups that solve country-specific problems.
- Share your opinion on this. (IIM Bangalore)
- Cinema has deeply influenced the Indian society. Has the influence been detrimental or beneficial? (IIM Calcutta)
- Change the plan but never the goal. (IIM Kozhikode)
- Religion divides us, problems unite us. (MDI)
- Is globalization good for workers and their rights? (IIM Indore)
- Would the concept of Smart Cities solve India's economic and social problems? (IIM Kozhikode)
- Transformation in social and cultural values is the only way to prevent violence against women in India. (IIM Kozhikode)
- Can India become a cashless society? (IIM Lucknow)
- The world got 'Trump'ed! (IIFT)
- Is free market a prerequisite for growth? (IIM Lucknow)
- Should income tax be abolished in India? (MDI Gurgaon)
- Aadhaar – opportunities and challenges ahead. (IIM Indore)
- Is establishing an IIT and an IIM in every state a right move? Will it affect the brand value of these institutions? What challenges will it present? (IIM Bangalore)
- 'Free Basics' by Facebook can be seen as a disadvantage for the digital have-nots. (IIM Bangalore)
- Mass Media – a boon or bane? (IIM Kozhikode)
- Is terrorism something which originates because of religion or deprivation? Or is it that some people with vested interests want to leverage their personal benefits out of it? (IIM Kozhikode)
- Your young cousin is confused about what she should pursue for higher studies. How will you guide her? What factors would you consider before giving her advice? (IIM Indore)
- What skill set should be imparted to Indian students to ensure that they become force to reckon with in the job sector? (IIM Indore)
- Earlier people did not fear people who migrated to their city, but nowadays they look at them with suspicion. Is migration raising fear among locals? What can the state do to avoid this conflict? (IIM Calcutta)
- Private sector promotes employability and public sector promotes employment. (IIM Kozhikode)
- Can a developing country afford to preserve its monuments, natural wonders, living heritage like culture and performing arts? Do you think they should be preserved? Share your views. (IIM Calcutta)
- Is cricket killing other sports in India? (IIM Indore)
- The best way to destroy your enemy is to make her/him your friend. (IIM Kozhikode)
- I love India and detest Indians. (IIM Indore)
- Is obesity becoming a problem of urban India? (New IIMs)
- One plus one cannot be two. (IIM Indore)
- What do you think has an immediate impact on humans – an economic disaster or environmental destruction? (IIM Kozhikode)
- The Supreme Court ruled that national anthem should be played in cinema halls. Is it the only way to promote patriotism? What is your opinion? (IIM Indore)

GD Topics

- Can the world economy bank upon India for growth? (IIFT)
- Can India achieve 9% GDP growth rate? (IIFT)
- Democracy is hampering progress in India. (MDI Gurgaon)
- Should violent video games be banned? (MDI Gurgaon)
- Women in politics: empowerment or tokenism? (MDI Gurgaon)
- Is Third Front the future of Indian politics? (MDI Gurgaon)
- Smartphones: boon or bane? (MDI Gurgaon)
- If companies are cozy with the government, then it promotes them. (XLRI)
- Inclusive growth in India is a myth. (XLRI)
- Are foreign managers better than their Indian counterparts? (XLRI)
- Hard work or smart work – which is better? (NITIE)

BREXIT. (IIFT)

- Democracy in India cannot be successful until equal representation is given to each state. (XLRI)
- If beauty is skin deep, then how can truth be beautiful? (XLRI)
- Is secularism still relevant? (XLRI)
- The golden rule is that there is no golden rule. (IIM Lucknow)
- Patents on medicines should not be applicable to underdeveloped countries. (IIM Lucknow)
- Is a college degree required for achieving success in today's life? (IIM Lucknow & IIM Kozhikode)
- Mangalyaan is not a breakthrough in science but just a nasty kick to diseased economy. (IIM Kozhikode)
- Should capital punishment be abolished in India? (IIM Kozhikode)
- As long as cricket is there, betting will be there. (IIM Kozhikode)
- Cyber law bill has failed. Cyberspace patrolling is just not possible. (IIM Kozhikode)
- Entrepreneurs cannot be produced inside business schools. (IIM Lucknow)
- Should the budget for space programme in India be invested in poverty alleviation? (IIM Lucknow)
- 'What do I want to do in life' is the least pondered question for most of us. Your thoughts on this issue. (IIM Lucknow)
- Grass is always greener on the other side. (NITIE)
- Business and ethics – can they go hand in hand? (NITIE)
- Recession is the mother of innovation. (NITIE)
- Is love marriage better than arranged marriage? (Goa Institute of Management)
- Is honesty still the best policy? (FORE Delhi)
- Should school children be allowed to use and own mobile phones? (Goa Institute of Management)
- Should mobile phones and tablets replace text books to save the trees? (NITIE)
- Joint Family is the solution to today's ailing society. (LBSIM Delhi)
- Should Income Tax be abolished in India? (XLRI)
- Can all good individual performers definitely transform into good leaders? (XLRI)
- Discuss the influence of the media on the society? (XLRI)
- Can there ever be peace with Pakistan? (NITIE)
- Should local language be the medium of instruction in primary schools? (NITIE)
- Can the world economy bank upon India for growth? (IIFT)
- Can India achieve 9% GDP growth rate? (IIFT)
- What should India do to have its own Facebooks, Alibabas & Googles? (IIMK)
- Reading after a certain age reduces creativity. (IIMK)
- The government ban on Maggi noodles was not justified. Discuss. (IIFT)
- Whistle blowers or disloyal agents? (NITIE)
- Secularism in India: Challenges & concerns. (TISS)
- Try not to be a man of success but a man of value. (IIMK)

B-School Interview Experiences

Interview for: IIM Ahmedabad

Qualification: B. Tech. (CSE)

Work ex: 20 months

Hobbies: Literary prizes, working with NGO.

Anything extra: Working on business plan.

The number of panelists: 3, to be called P1, P2 & P3.

P1: Tell me what your company does?

P1: What kind of financial data?

P1: You seem to be uncomfortable with financial fundamentals? Do you want me to move to computer science directly? (Sir, let me put it in a better way again.)

P1: We don't have much time over here.

P1: Okay, now explain in two lines why your project is crucial to your company?

P1: This is easy work to do. (P1 remained unconvinced.)

P1: Okay, so why do you want to do an MBA? (Sir, I want to become an entrepreneur. I am already working on this project – explained the b-plan in brief; asked permission to use paper and pencil to explain all the verticals of the b-plan using block diagrams.)

P1 (looked interested): Why do you think you have the skills to do this? This plan is rural in nature. You are completely in the IT corporate world. (Sir, I believe, it is not about skills, it is about passion.

P1 (Sarcastically): Do you really think so? What is the percentage of people dependent on agriculture in rural areas? What is the revenue model of your planned venture? Why do you think it will work?

P2: So, you are from DB team, explain normalization.

P2: What is the full form of BCNF?

P2: Explain 1 NF, 2 NF, 3 NF.

P2: Okay, why do you have this interest in mythology?

P2: What is the name of Hanuman's son? (Unable to recollect the name.)

P2: Who was his father? (At that time, it just struck me that Hanuman never married.)

P2: Okay, now tell me, who was his son? (Sir, he did not marry, so technically, he should have no son.)

P2 started laughing, saying that he loved the word 'technically'.

P2: This is fine, but I believe that at your age, spirituality and mythology don't suit you. You should go around girls. Do you have a girlfriend? (No, Sir, but I am in a search mode.)

P2: (laughing) Of course, if you go around telling girls about mythology, what else do you expect? (Sir, in that case, my second hobby – writing Hindi poetry – would be useful; the two professors smile.)

P3: What is your favourite subject? (DBMS)

P3: Tell me about Boyce-Codd normal form.

P2: Thank you, we are done. Please take a toffee.

**

Interview for: IIM Lucknow

Qualification: B. Tech. (ECE)

Work ex: 30 months

Hobbies: Kathak, glass painting, & rangoli.

Number of panelists: Two, P1 & P2

P1: How do you spell your name?

P2: How do you spell your surname?

P1: Is it your father's name or something else? (My community's name, Sir.)

P1: So, you are from Andhra. Is it? (Telangana, Sir.)

P1: Ya, ya, you guys fought for it for many years.

P1: Can I have a look at your file, please?

P1: What is this? (I had my passport placed in the file.)

P1: Why is it called Republic of India?

P1: Is India a republic or democratic? (I said 'democratic'.)

P1: Then why is it a Republic?

P1: What is the U.S.?

P1: Really, I'm shocked! (raised his voice)

P1: Where do you get good biryani? (Discussion on various Hyderabad restaurants; the student is from Hyderabad.)
P1: Do you know how to cook biryani?
P1: Please give me the recipe.
P1: Is there something called a vegetable biryani? (Yes, there is, Sir. I'm a vegetarian but my parents are non-vegetarians.)
P1: Why did you stop eating non-vegetarian food?
P1: Tell me about your parents, their work.
P1: What is your father's salary?
P1: Where is your brother's college? Give us the address of your college.
P1: Tell us about your work.
P1: What tools do you use? What are the other uses of the technology?
P1: What are your hobbies? (I'm a trained Kathak dancer in Lucknow Gharana.)
P1: You are from Hyderabad. So, where did you learn Kathak in Lucknow Gharana?
P1: Explain the differences between Bharatanatyam and Kathak.
P1: Can you dance for us? (Yes, Sir; I was about to get up – but was asked to sit and show some mudra.)
P2: Why is it called Kathak?
P1: What are your other interview calls? (Calls from IIMs B, I, K and the New IIMs.)
P1: So, which one will you join? (Non-committal answer)
P1: You are familiar with Lucknow Gharana and you can cook biryani, why not join IIML? (Both the panellists laughed hard when the student said 'yes'.)
P1: Please take a toffee and leave.

**

Interview for: IIM Ahmedabad

Qualification: B. Tech. (CSE)

Work ex: 33 months

Hobbies: Quizzing & watching magic tricks.

The number of panelists: Two, female professor (FP) and male professor (MP).

MP: Where do you work? (Company X – we have deliberately left the company's name out to make such questions universally applicable.)

FP: Who are the competitors of Company X?

FP: What is the market capitalization of Company X?

FP: What is its share price?

MP: What is its revenue?

FP: How much did Company X pay to acquire Company Y? Has the acquisition worked well for Company X?

MP: Draw the graph of $|x| / (1+|x|)$.

MP: Is it differentiable at $x=0$?

MP: Is it continuous at $x=0$?

MP: How do you find the differentiation at a point?

MP: Draw the graph of $x / (1+x)$.

MP: Is it differentiable at $x=-1$?

FP: What are your hobbies? (Watching magic tricks and quizzing.)

FP: Share some tricks.

MP: As an engineer, which trick appealed to you the most?

MP: Share a quiz fact you learnt recently. (Morarji Desai won Pakistan's highest civilian award.)

MP: What is the exact name of the award?

FP: Did any Pakistani get Bharat Ratna?

FP: Name another famous Indian who received an award from Pakistan.

FP: Why was there a controversy then?

MP: Just as India has tensions in Kashmir, Pakistan has some issues – which part/state?

FP: How do I go from Mumbai to Mount Kilimanjaro?

FP: If I want to see penguins, where do I go? (Antarctica or New Zealand, Sir.)

FP: If don't want to go to Antarctica or New Zealand, then?

FP: What's the capital of Chile?

FP: Is Chile a democracy?

FP: Who is Augusto Pinochet?

MP: Thank you, you may go now.

Reading Ladder: A Guide to Mastering RC

The importance of the reading skill cannot be overemphasized. It is an integral part of management entrance tests such as the CAT. In addition to the Reading Comprehension (RC) segment of any management entrance test, many question types in the Verbal Ability (VA) segment, such as para jumbles and para completion, test your ability to read and comprehend well. The other sections of management entrance tests, viz. Quantitative Aptitude, Logical Reasoning and Data Interpretation, also require you to read and assimilate vast amounts of text.

RC is an area that bothers almost everyone. While students do recognize this, they are confused as to how they should start working on this area. The paradox is that the recognition of the imperative role of reading in reaching the goal is not matched with or accompanied by the effort to embark on the journey. In this article, we present a road map which will help you not only become aware of the route to the destination, which is mastering RC, but also recognize that the road blocks are all in the mind. This road map is designed not just to enable you to excel in the RC section of the CAT but also to hone reading skills that can help you in manifold aspects of your life or career.

The fear of reading

The main issue here is the inherent fear of reading. The first thing you need to tell yourself that reading is an enjoyable activity. Most students fear reading. Throughout their childhood, they have had the single-minded devotion to 'mugging up' whatever they read so that they could perform well in exams. Further, most reading was confined to text-books with the objective of cracking exams, which, of course, kills the pleasure of reading.

You will be glad to know that the CAT does not require you to remember vast quantities of information that needs to be reproduced verbatim in the examination to score marks. What is being tested is the ability to read and interpret the written word. When you read a newspaper, do you ever try to memorise its contents? So, whenever you are reading, do not try to memorise; focus on understanding the issue and that will automatically make you remember the contents. Reading will become an enjoyable and rewarding activity. As a wise man said, "Reading a good book is like conversing with a great man". Take up reading as you would take up a pleasurable activity to fill the empty spaces of your mind, or as a committed friendship, because reading is, after all, a silent conversation.

The need for a road map

As a discerning traveller on the 'Reading Comprehension Journey', carry a backpack of patience and perseverance with you. Start with the curiosity of a traveller, not the *idée fixe* of a tourist.

A roadmap can help you:

1. know your level of preparedness, which, in turn, would give you a starting point for the journey;
2. show the way forward, and
3. evaluate your progress and make mid-course corrections, if required.

The basic premise of this road map is that if you are trying to improve your reading speed and comprehension, you should read at a speed slightly higher than your current speed, without compromising much on comprehension. Your current speed of reading is the fastest that you can read, while understanding much of the stated ideas in the content. If you push your reading speed

considerably up, you may not comprehend much of the content. This will only leave you feeling dejected. Aiming for incremental improvements in your reading speed will not, to a large extent, adversely affect comprehension. If this is done on a consistent basis, both reading speed and comprehension can improve.

How to read correctly

Reading is effective only when there is conscious participation from the reader. Keep a pencil handy when you read and whatever you find difficult to understand, underline the difficult portions or words. Once you have read the article, look up the difficult words in a dictionary. Understand the related and difficult-to-understand general awareness concepts by browsing on the internet. Then, read the article again. This ensures that you understand the words in the right context as well as get the complete meaning of the article. Many students find the meanings of the words in the dictionary, but do not read the article again. This is only semi-productive. This exercise helps you sharpen the valuable skill of decipherment, a priceless art in comprehension. Additionally, try to summarise the contents of the article, focusing on the important ideas. Writing summaries will help you become a better reader. This can be done better if, as habit, you note (mentally or on paper) the focal ideas in each paragraph, thereby understanding the author's flow of thought. Both these pieces of advice are for students at all rungs of the reading ladder (discussed below).

The roadmap a.k.a. The ladder of reading

The Bottom Rung

1. The bottom rung of the reading ladder consists of students who come from a background of Non-English medium of education at school or college level and are not able to read English newspapers. If you fall in this category, then start with simple magazines, books and newspapers. Keep a basic dictionary handy.

1.1. Read The Hindu and other similar comics in English. Tinkle is a simple and informative magazine with good quality English. You will understand simple conversations through comics and informative panels. If you find Tinkle tough, then you can even start reading Champak in English. After some time when you become comfortable with Champak, you can shift to Tinkle. You can read some simple and basic novels such as Chetan Bhagat's works.

1.2. Read NCERT books for Classes VI to X. You can read English, Science and Social Science books. Start with the books for Class VI and finish them in whatever time it takes. Then move to books of Class VII and so on. Later, you may read English books of Classes XI and XII and the course books in English medium for whatever subjects you had chosen in those classes. For example, students who studied Commerce in Hindi or Tamil medium may re-read commerce books in English. This will build a lot of basic vocabulary since the books are designed to improve the students' vocabulary and knowledge.

1.3. Read parts of newspapers meant for beginners/children. Some newspapers, like The Hindu, carry supplements for young children (8–14 years age group). These are yet another good source of simple vocabulary, simple sentence structure as well as good comprehension.

1.4. Once again, bear in mind that when you read, you are not trying to memorise anything. Just read along for understanding and enjoyment. Continue these exercises, till you are comfortable with this reading material. Then move to the next step.

The Second Rung

2. The second rung consists of the students who enjoy basic comfort with the English language but find it difficult to understand the moderately tough sections in English newspapers/other reading material. If you come in this category, then you can do the following:

2.1. Start by reading a quality newspaper completely. You can choose from TOI or Hindustan Times or Indian Express or any similar publication. Read news articles on national and international issues, and, of course, the editorials.

2.2. Read magazines like India Today, The Week, Outlook, Swarajya and Reader's Digest. MBA

Education and Careers (ME&C), published by T.I.M.E., will help a lot.

2.3. Read works of fiction by authors such as R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Khushwant Singh, John Grisham, Jeffrey Archer, Arthur Hailey, Sidney Sheldon, and Fredrick Forsyth. V. S. Naipaul's fiction is also doable at this level, but not the non-fiction. That is for later.

2.4. Read the 'Harry Potter Series', which is pretty good for beginners.

2.5. Start with simple non-fiction, like The Hindu .

2.6. Many students perceive Philosophy to be tough. 'Sophie's World' is highly recommended in this case.

The Third Rung

3. The third rung consists of the students who are fairly comfortable with the English language but find it difficult to understand the tough sections of reading materials. If you fall in this category, then here's what you have to do:

3.1. Start reading a quality newspaper. The Hindu is possibly the best newspaper for you. Start with the main news page and then read the middle two pages completely. It could be initially challenging to read serious issues and articles dealing with society's problems but that is what is required! Read the editorials, articles, and opinion pieces completely.

3.2. Read Frontline and foreign magazines like TIME, Bloomberg BusinessWeek, Forbes, and Fortune; look up their websites.

3.4. Try reading non-fiction. Books on self-help make for good reads. Start with basic books in the areas of Sciences, Psychology, Sociology, Arts, History, and Philosophy. Here are some recommendations: How to Win Friends & Influence People (Dale Carnegie), The Road Less Travelled (Scott Peck); The Third Wave, Future Shock, Power Shift (all by Alvin Toffler), Lateral Thinking (Edward De Bono), India Unbound (Gurcharan Das) and India After Gandhi (Ramachandra Guha). A Brief History of Nearly Everything (Bill Bryson) and Sapiens (Yuval Noah Harari) can excite one's interest in the sciences. Biographies are also recommended – The Story of My Experiments with Truth (Mahatma Gandhi), Iacocca (Lee Iacocca), and Made in Japan (Akio Morita).

3.5. Start with simple poetry. Ogden Nash and Nissim Ezekiel are good choices.

The Top Rung

4. The fourth rung is of the students who are pretty comfortable with the English language and want to peruse even tougher work/texts to ensure that their CAT preparation is up to the mark.

4.1. Along with the material mentioned in the last rung, you can start to read The Economist (www.economist.com) and the McKinsey Quarterly (www.mckinseyquarterly.com).

4.2. Start to read difficult fiction, like 'Catch-22' by Joseph Heller, works of Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, and Vikram Seth. Ayn Rand (We the Living; Fountainhead, and Atlas Shrugged) is a perennial favourite at this level. J. R. R. Tolkien's 'The Lord of the Rings' trilogy is a good choice.

4.3. In non-fiction, Robert Pirsig (Lila: An Inquiry into Morals; Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance), Bertrand Russell, and

J. Krishnamurthy are recommended for philosophy. You can read Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud on psychology. Fritjof Capra (The Tao of Physics) and Stephen Hawking (A Brief History of Time) lend a strong base for an understanding of the sciences.

4.4. Try modern poetry. Don't overdo it. Poets to read are Rabindranath Tagore, Robert Frost, W. H. Auden, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Marianne Moore, Ezra Pound, and William Butler Yeats. You can search for their poems on the internet.

4.5. Supplements of The Hindu and articles from Frontline are a good source of critiques and reviews of fine arts, including paintings and other cultural aspects. Book reviews of non-fiction works provide good practice for strengthening your RC capability.

Computer Based Test – CAT

Due to the CBT nature of the CAT, you should be comfortable with reading on a computer. You should practice the RC material on the student homepage on www.time4education.com. Additionally, you can make use of the following websites:

a. www.aldaily.com (Arts and Letters Daily) – a good website for moderate to tough articles on a variety of areas like philosophy, ideas, criticism, and language.

- b. www.magportal.com – a website that is essentially a link guide to articles on the web.
- c. www.indiatogether.org – a good collection of articles on issues faced by India.
- d. www.atimes.com – good articles on international affairs from an Asian perspective.
- e. www.nytimes.com – excellent op-ed section.
- f. www.edge.org – a blog/website on technology and its interplay with society.
- g. en.wikipedia.org – you can always read Wikipedia for the articles on topics you are not familiar with. You can click on the bibliography articles (listed at the end of most articles) to see tougher articles on the same topic.
- h. You can download apps of various newspapers. Additionally, good news aggregators, like inshorts, can improve your GK and reading.

What next?

If you believe you have already crossed/aced stage 4, then start re-doing stage 4 in comparatively less time. It will automatically increase the pressure, e.g., the RC passages in the AIMCATs and the CAT are expected to be between levels 3 and 4. You can redo some of those in less time, say 75% of the time allocated earlier. That is sufficient to create the desired stress while reading.

Use library facilities at your T.I.M.E. centre where you may see quite a few books from the recommended lists. Good reading is linked to good writing too. As you read more, it will help you write better, which will help you write impressive essays. Share your thoughts on reading with a like-minded peer group as discussion helps broaden perspective. Remember that the destination is made worthwhile by the journey that shows not just places but also new paths!

Pointers on Preparation and Test-Taking Strategies

Posted on [March 27, 2018](#) by [admin](#)

The management entrance exam season has just started. Kicking off with the NMAT, this season will last around four months with multiple entrance tests, like the CAT, NMAT, IIFT, SNAPTest, XAT, TISSNET, and CMAT, lined up. Given the spate of the entrance tests, it is only natural for you to feel overwhelmed. The aim of this article is to help you plan and keep your mind clear, which would ensure that you give your best in these exams.

Preparation

Let us first focus on the preparation part. The best of testtaking strategies will fail if the preparation for the tests is not effective. In fact, your test-taking strategy is often influenced by the level of preparation. So, let us look at this most important aspect.

Do not prepare only for select topics based on what has come in the past few years or based on your comfort level. The CAT and the Other Management Entrance Tests (OMETs) have a knack for being highly unpredictable. Questions from topics, which haven't appeared in the tests for several years, may make an appearance in this year's entrance tests. In such case, it is important to prepare for all test areas.

You may not enjoy a high comfort level in some test areas; however, it is advised that you work toward gaining a basic level of comfort in such test areas as this would help you attempt questions of low difficulty level in those areas.

Test-Taking

AIMCATs

It is important to ascertain one's level of preparation vis-à-vis the competition. This is important as the CAT and the OMETs give out percentiles, which reflect relative performance. However, it is a general misconception that just taking as many mock tests as possible will help. Taking mock tests on a regular basis, followed by thorough and honest analysis of one's performance, will greatly help in streamlining the preparation effort through course correction.

At a broad level, taking one AIMCAT and one (or two) SAMCAT per week, followed by thorough analysis of one's performance (and the overall test), would help. Also, take the 'Advanced Online Sectional Test' on a regular basis.

Do not waste time in speculation

The CAT and the OMETs do not follow a fixed pattern and hence, it is important to not speculate about this year's test pattern. As you know, the CAT committee has not disclosed the number of questions per section in this year's exam; in light of this, one should plan and prepare for various possibilities in the runup to the CAT 2017. The AIMCAT series will come in handy as the various tests will expose you to different test patterns and variations (like in the number of questions in a section).

Do not target a specific number of questions

Cut-offs are a function of the difficulty level of the section and the paper. Targeting a pre-set number of questions to clear the cut-offs may not work most of the time as you may be able to breach your target.

As there is a sectional time limit (of 60 minutes) in the CAT, your focus should be on maximising the score. For exams that do not feature individual section timing, the number of attempts per section should be decided in the test, based on the difficulty of the paper.

Blind Guesswork – A Big No!

Blind guesswork has been the bane of many a test-taker. Negative marks, often the result of blind guesswork, eat into the marks gained through correct answers.

However, if you can eliminate two/three choices (out of four/five choices), you may then consider making an ‘informed guess’, based on what your instinct tells you. For this ‘instinct’ to work in your favour, you need to be well-prepared. Remember that fortune favours the prepared, much more than it does the brave.

Plan your prep

Do not pick any topic/test area, at random, to prepare. It is important to build a ‘measurable plan’ for the next several weeks, till the CAT. For example, in VARC, target to solve a pre-decided number of questions (in different areas like RC) or pick an entire question type (like para-summary) for daily practice. This should be followed by three days of intensive grammar preparation covering all the standard models of questions. You can take a call on vocabulary, based on your current comfort level.

This kind of a measurable plan will help you track your progress on a real-time basis. During all this, continue taking AIMCATs as they help identify priority areas (through thorough analysis) and revise your preparation plan, if required.

What if I don’t make it?

At times, Roger Federer, arguably the greatest tennis player of all time, suffers losses. It is normal to ask yourself an uncomfortable question: ‘What if I don’t make it?’ Do I have a Plan B?

If you don’t have a Plan B, make one!

In fact, people are successful only because they have a Plan B. An alternative plan, i.e., Plan B, cuts down risk.

In the case of exams, Plan B would relate to ‘taking multiple tests’. Consider the OMETs – XAT, SNAPTEST, TISSNET, NMAT, IBSAT, MAT, and CMAT. Most of these exams have a difficulty level that is much lower than the CAT. Also, most of these tests are held after the CAT – this would give you considerable preparation time to do well. The sectoral programmes of various institutes tend to attract less number of applications than the regular programmes. Also, the selection process is easier than it is for the flagship programme. Identify a few such programmes/b-schools that offer good return on investment. We recommend that you refer to T.I.M.E.’s b-school categorisation list (available in this issue) for more details or get in touch with the faculty at the nearest T.I.M.E. centre.

All the best!

India's best B-schools

Posted on [March 27, 2018](#) by [admin](#)

India is home to more than 3,000 business schools offering the Master of Business Administration (MBA) programme. A significant number of these schools boast of offering great quality of management education and great placements. Most of these boastful claims are just that – boasts without any basis in facts. However, there are some excellent schools which offer the right springboard for a successful leap into the business world.

In such context, MBA aspirants often face the unenviable task of choosing the right b-schools to consider for application (and later enrolling). It is well-known that an MBA benefits the aspirant only if it is pursued from a top b-school. However, what constitutes 'top' varies between people and between years.

It is important for students to consider the key parameters for the selection of b-schools. Students should evaluate the performance of the b-schools on these parameters and make a shortlist of good schools. This is a complex process which needs a lot of information about the schools. While trying to obtain this information, there is a great possibility that aspirants might fall prey to the false claims found in various media, including the internet. With the avowed aim of helping students make the right choice without getting swayed by false claims, T.I.M.E. has been releasing its list of top B-Schools for several years now. The B-School Categorization List, which features b-schools in various categories, is the result of several months of extensive research and data collection and is monitored by experts who have over 25 years of experience in guiding students on MBA admissions.

The basic purpose of this article is two-fold: (a) make you aware of the various parameters that should be looked at while selecting a b-school and (b) introduce you to T.I.M.E.'s List of the Top 150 B-Schools in India.

METHODOLOGY

(a) How is the list arrived at? T.I.M.E. uses the strength of its country-wide network of experts who have been mentoring students for years for the b-school selection process. The B-School Categorization process followed by us is an elaborate multi-step process where due weightage is given to the data available about an institute in the public domain and the opinion of experts at T.I.M.E.. This blend of expert opinion and objective data is what makes it the most accurate categorization available. The parameters used comprise the following:

- (a) placement data;
- (b) cut-off score in entrance exam;
- (c) location;
- (d) institute's age, and
- (e) fee.

While these parameters constitute the objective aspect of the categorization methodology, the rating given by T.I.M.E. experts to each institute along with the quality of alumni and faculty constitute the subjective aspect. An elaborate scoring system is devised for each of the objective parameters, which is reviewed and modified by the expert panel. The data related to each institute for each of the above parameters is collected and scrutinised for its authenticity. Finally, scores are assigned to the institutes based on the scoring system according to the authenticated data of the institute. Please

note that only the schools offering two-year programmes, with at least one graduate batch, have been considered for this exercise.

The objective parameters that we use for our categorization process are:

(i) Placements

The career opportunities that an MBA provides in the short- and long-term, the speed of growth that it offers, the variety of roles that one can get into, etc., should be the main reasons for doing an MBA. Salaries are only a concomitant factor and should not be the only reason for one to get into an MBA programme. However, as the other parameters can only be visualised and objectively measured long later after one graduates from the MBA programme, salaries at the time of campus placements are used as an indirect measure to gauge the MBA programme.

The advantage with salary data is that such data are broadly objective – one can lay a finger on them and come to a general understanding about the quality of placements at a b-school. The data are also important, considering that students at b-schools invest not just two valuable years of their life but also a considerable amount of money (in fee). To expect a commensurate return from this high investment – more of time than money – is only natural. The salary data hence reflect the ‘quality’ of return.

A large number of b-schools resort to statistical (and other kinds of) gimmickry while reporting the salary figures. While some schools may not release any placement data, some list only the names of companies that visit the campus for recruitment without revealing other info (like salary and job profiles offered). Some carry historical data of the names of companies to create an impression as if all of them visited the campus for the recent round of placements.

While inflating the salary figures happens often, adding ‘signing or joining bonuses’ or ‘variable pay’ into the reported pay packages happens frequently.

Most schools do not reveal the percentage or number of students who do not secure jobs. This kind of gimmickry, as one can see, is fairly common. As such, one needs to be careful while trying to understand the placements at b-schools.

Unfortunately, there is no standard procedure for reporting placement data that b-schools are required to follow. Any such requirement could have put a stop to making false claims and would have rendered the picture on placements clear.

In 2011, the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (IIMA) took the initiative of putting in place a set of reporting standards called the Indian Placement Reporting Standards (IPRS). This laudable initiative has, unfortunately and not surprisingly, found little traction among other b-schools. T.I.M.E. greatly admires the transparency that a standard like IPRS can bring into the system, especially because it mandates that b-schools have their placement report audited by a third party. As one of the very few coaching institutes, which gets its results audited by a third party, we understand the kind of honesty and effort that goes into ensuring the quality of such an audit. We have, hence, as part of the categorization exercise, accorded positive credit to the schools that report their placements in line with the IPRS.

(You can know more about the IPRS at <http://www.iimahd.ernet.in/iprs/index.php>.)

(ii) Cut-off in entrance test

Students help a b-school get stronger on its brand and the b-school’s brand value in-turn helps the students move ahead faster in their career. It is only natural for the schools to select the best students while the brightest students would definitely wish to get into only the best schools.

It is also important to note that the quality of students directly impacts the quality of learning, especially as the amount of peer learning that happens at a top b-school is quite significant. In this context, cutoff percentile is, therefore, a strong indicator of the quality of the students at a b-school – the higher the cutoff, the better the quality of the students.

Some b-schools give significant weightage to other important parameters like academics and work experience. However, even at these schools, the entrance test percentile cutoff are significantly higher than some of the schools which are listed in the categories immediately below them.

(iii) Fee

Fee is not a direct indicator of the quality of a school. One should rate a school high just because of its fee nor should one trash a school solely because of it. Many top schools charge a pretty high fee of around ₹19-₹20 lakh while a few top schools charge as low as ₹3 lakh. As fee cannot be an independent parameter to evaluate a b-school, it should be used in conjunction with parameters like placement and brand value of the b-school.

The RoI (Return on Investment) needs to be considered carefully, particularly when the fee level is high. This would mean that unless a student gets a pay package of a certain value, the fee expense doesn't make much financial sense. The RoI becomes a significant factor as one moves down the list of b-schools, particularly in schools beyond the top three categories.

(iv) Location of the b-school

What has been said about fee not being a straight-forward parameter to handle also applies to the 'location' parameter.

There could be an excellent school in a relatively inferior location or vice versa. However, do keep in mind that location plays not a minor role in attracting faculty and industry (for placements) to the campus. The brand strength of an institute can counter the effect of location to a very large extent.

A good brand can attract faculty and industry even to a relatively less popular location. This is the primary reason why the New IIMs, despite being in so-called 'remote' places, have been able to command respect from both the academia and the industry within a short span of time. But, as one moves down the categorization list, particularly outside the top 50, the brand strength wanes and the influence of location looms large.

(v) Other

factors The quality of faculty and the quality of infrastructure are two important factors to be considered while evaluating a b-school.

Necessary care should be taken while reading into these data points, as some things are not quite as straightforward as they seem. Claims like the number of PhD faculty, visiting faculty, etc., should not be taken at face value as some of the names so cited may not actually be teaching at those schools.

The number of full-time professors versus part-timers can also be a misleading data point and neither a high nor a low number here indicates better/inferior teaching. JBIMS, a top 10 b-school, with its many visiting professors, is a case in point. One may be tempted to consider the lack of infrastructure as a severe handicap.

However, it is to be noted that some of the new b-schools, which have a good 'parent' brand, have been able to overcome the infrastructure handicap and have performed well. The New IIMs (Kashipur, Raipur, Ranchi, Rohtak, Trichy, and Udaipur) and IIFT Kolkata are prime examples.

(b) What the list contains and what it doesn't

Those looking at our list may have queries like: why are the one-year MBA programmes missing from the list, why is IIM Jammu not in the list, and why is the HHR programme of IIM Ranchi in the list. As mentioned earlier, we have considered only two-year MBA/ PGDM programmes for the list.

We bring any eligible schools into our consideration set only after they have completed two years of operation, which would mean that their first batch would have graduated. That is because only then we can assess the school on all the parameters that we consider for our categorization. IIM Jammu, for example, has not been considered this year as its first batch will graduate next year. Also, the categorization considers only the flagship programme of the schools.

For example, for IIM Ranchi, the flagship PGP is considered. While it is true that the institute's PGP-HR cannot be considered on par with the flagship PGP, the former programme benefits significantly from the rub-off of the latter programme.

CATEGORIZATION The B-Schools in the list below are divided into seven broad categories: Top 10 category features world-class institutes, like XLRI and some of the IIMs, every student aspires of securing an admission into. Many of these institutes are comparable with the best in the world.

Indeed, some of them regularly feature in the lists released by international business magazines. These institutes invariably have a 100% placement record.

Even the not-so-academically-good students at these institutes manage to get good jobs due to the 'rub-off' effect of the institute. AAA& AAA categories of institutes make the Top 30. They offer high quality of education, faculty, and infrastructure. These institutes have a 100% placement record. A significant number of the top students at these institutes secure placements that are comparable to those offered at the Top 10 institutes.

AA & A categories of institutes offer a consistent and high quality of education, faculty, and infrastructure facilities.

A good number of students at these schools get placements which are much better than the placements of the lower half of the categories above (Top 10, AAA and AAA). These institutes are successful in providing high-quality placements to their top students, especially those who have effective communication skills.

BBB+, BBB and BB categories of institutes are well regarded by the industry and are generally successful in placing their students. Some of these schools have been very strong brands themselves earlier, and have been pushed down the list only because of the addition of the New IIMs in the last few years.

This shows that most of these hold their ground successfully and that students can rely on them to give a boost to their career.

Band B categories of schools enjoy a good reputation in the business world. These institutes may not provide too many national-level placement opportunities but are generally successful in providing placements to many of their students with prominent companies – local and national.

Apart from all these, we have also listed b-schools under the 'Others' category. These institutes may be found to be lacking in one or more of:

(a) infrastructure;

(b) industry interface;

- (c) faculty;
- (d) alumni network;
- (e) curriculum, and
- (f) placements.

However, we believe these colleges are better than the hordes of others that do not feature in our list at all. You are hence advised to get thorough information (by visiting the campuses and speaking with past and current students) about these institutes before making any decision regarding them.

In short, the above categorization would mean that the top 50 schools – Top 10, AAA+, AAA, AA and A categories – would be the schools to aspire for.

How will this categorization help you? The first question you should address is: 'How many b-schools should I apply to?'. The answer will depend on a few factors. The first factor is your budget. With the cost of the application for each institute being in the range of `500 to `2500, you may not want to look at more than 7-8 institutes. But whatever be the number of institutes you wish to apply to, it is always a good practice to select institutes across categories.

The second factor is what you are doing currently:

(a) Pursuing final year of graduation: In this case, you may be keen on getting into a management institute but can afford to try again if you do not get into an institute of your choice. So, you may apply rather selectively.

(b) Completed graduation in the last academic session, not pursuing any higher studies, and not working either: In this case, you should try get into a reasonably good institute. So, the number of institutes that you apply will be higher than in the case of the first category.

(c) Completed graduation and currently working: You can be pretty selective unless you have been working for more than 4-5 years in which case, you may not want to lose further time in getting into a management institute. The third factor in deciding the number of institutes to which you should apply to is your performance in the entrance exams.

Depending on your performance, you may want to hedge your risk by applying to more institutes – particularly, to institutes across categories that we discussed above. Once you decide the number of institutes you wish to apply to, let us look at how you will go about deciding the types of such institutes. Here, the cardinal principle is to safeguard your interests and reduce your risk; so, you should apply to institutes in at least three different tiers.

Let's say you wish to apply to seven institutes. First, you should consider your performance in the AIMCATs. If your scores are in the 85–95 percentile range, then apart from the IIMs (which you can apply to in the same form while registering for the CAT), you should apply to three other institutes in the next category and two institutes in the category after that. It will also be worth applying to MDI and/or SPJIMR.

Also, if you are interested in sectoral programmes, you should apply to some of the sectoral institutes, like IIFT and TISS. Finally, it is always a good idea to apply to as many institutes as possible, based on one's budget, to maximise one's chances as one is never sure about the criteria each institute would follow for admissions. Key points to note

(i) As one moves into the BBB towards the B and other categories, one has to pay increasing attention to the RoI factor – a combination of the fee and placement statistics.

(ii) A b-school that may appeal to an aspirant may not appeal to another. This is because of differences in aspirations, abilities, financial conditions, etc.

(iii) Do not go only by the placement data and generally be wary of the attractive claims made by the b-schools.

(iv) As you know, the presence of a school in a particular category is determined by a combination of factors. You may find a school, listed in a category below, doing better on a particular parameter. However, when all the factors are looked at together, the schools listed in the higher category are better overall than the schools listed in the category below.

(v) Within a category, the schools are listed only alphabetically, i.e., 'in-category' ranking has not been done. Assigning individual rank to schools is not objectively possible and is also not totally fair to the b-schools.

We arrive at category sizes keeping in mind that the schools in a particular category should broadly be equal. You would observe that the grouping categories do not have uniformity about the number of b-schools per category. This was done to ensure brand homogeneity across parameters (like placement) within a category.

If you wish to choose between schools within a category, you are advised to find more information about the specific schools.

India's Top 150 B-Schools (all lists in alphabetical order)

Top Ten

- Faculty of Management Studies (FMS), University of Delhi, Delhi
- Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT), New Delhi
- Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (IIMA)
- Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIMB)
- Indian Institute of Management Calcutta (IIMC)
- Indian Institute of Management Lucknow (IIML)
- Jamnalal Bajaj Institute of Management Studies (JBIMS), Mumbai
- Management Development Institute (MDI), Gurgaon
- S. P. Jain Institute of Management & Research (SPJIMR), Mumbai
- XLRI – Xavier School of Management, Jamshedpur

AAA+

- Department of Management Studies, Indian Institute of Technology Delhi (IITD)
- Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT), Kolkata
- Indian Institute of Management Indore (IIMI)
- Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode (IIMK)
- Indian Institute of Management Ranchi (IIM Ranchi)
- Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies (NMIMS), Mumbai
- National Institute of Industrial Engineering (NITIE), Mumbai
- Rajiv Gandhi Indian Institute of Management (RGIIM), Shillong
- Shailesh J. Mehta School of Management (SJMSOM), IIT Bombay (IITB)
- Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai

AAA

- Department of Management Studies (DOMS), Indian Institute of Science Bangalore (IISc.)
- Indian Institute of Management Indore (IIMI), Mumbai campus

- Indian Institute of Management Raipur (IIM Raipur)
- Indian Institute of Management Rohtak (IIM Rohtak)
- Indian Institute of Management Trichy (IIMT)
- Indian Institute of Management Udaipur (IIMU)
- Indian Institute of Management Kashipur (IIMKa)
- Symbiosis Centre for Management & Human Resource Development (SCMHRD), Pune
- Symbiosis Institute of Business Management (SIBM), Pune
- Vinod Gupta School of Management (VGSOM), Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur (IIT-KGP)

AA

- Department of Commerce, Delhi School of Economics (DSE), University of Delhi
- Department of Financial Studies (DFS), University of Delhi
- Department of Industrial & Management Engineering (IME), IIT Kanpur (IITK)
- Department of Management Studies (DoMS), Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IITM)
- Indian Institute of Management Nagpur (IIM Nagpur)
- Indian Institute of Management Visakhapatnam (IIMV)
- International Management Institute (IMI), New Delhi
- MICA Ahmedabad
- Sydenham Institute of Management Studies, Research & Entrepreneurship Education, Mumbai (SIMSREE)
- Xavier Institute of Management Bhubaneswar (XIMB)

A

- Bharathidasan Institute of Management (BIM), Trichy
- Department of Business Economics, University of Delhi
- FORE School of Management, New Delhi
- Great Lakes Institute of Management (GLIM), Chennai (PGDM Two-Year Programme)
- Indian Institute of Management Amritsar (IIM Amritsar)
- Indian Institute of Management Bodh Gaya (IIM Bodh Gaya)
- Indian Institute of Management Sambalpur (IIM Sambalpur)
- Indian Institute of Management Sirmaur (IIM Sirmaur)
- Institute of Management Technology (IMT), Ghaziabad
- Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA)
- K. J. Somaiya Institute of Management Studies & Research (SIMSR), Mumbai
- MISB Bocconi, Mumbai
- National Institute of Banking & Management (NIBM), Pune
- Symbiosis Institute of International Business (SIIB), Pune
- T. A. Pai Management Institute (TAPMI), Manipal

BBB+

- Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, MHRM, IIT-KGP
- Department of Management Studies (DOMS), IIT Roorkee (IIT Roorkee)
- Faculty of Management Studies, Banaras Hindu University (FMS-BHU)
- Goa Institute of Management (GIM), Goa
- Institute for Financial Management & Research (IFMR), Chennai
- Lal Bahadur Shastri Institute of Management (LBSIM), Delhi
- Loyola Institute of Business Administration (LIBA), Chennai
- MANAGE, Hyderabad (only for those interested in Agri-Business/Rural Management)
- Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies, Bengaluru (NMIMS-B)
- Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies, Hyderabad (NMIMS-H)
- Nirma University Institute of Management (NIRMA), Ahmedabad
- Prin. L. N. Welingkar Institute of Management Development & Research (WE School), Mumbai
- Shri Ram College of Commerce, MBA-GBO, Delhi
- Symbiosis Institute of Business Management, Bengaluru (SIBM-B)

- University Business School (UBS), Panjab University, Chandigarh

BBB

- Birla Institute of Management Technology (BIMTECH), NOIDA
- Birla Institute of Technology & Science (BITS), Pilani
- Christ University Institute of Management (CUIM), Bengaluru
- Delhi School of Management (Delhi Technological University), Delhi
- Hyderabad Central University (HCU), Hyderabad
- ICFAI Business School (IBS), Hyderabad
- Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM), Bhopal
- Indian Institute of Social Welfare & Business Management (IISWBM), Kolkata
- National Institute of Technology Tiruchirappalli (NITT)
- National Insurance Academy (NIA), Pune
- SIES College of Management Studies (SIESCOM), Mumbai
- Symbiosis Institute of Management Studies (SIMS), Pune
- Symbiosis Institute of Operations Management (SIOM), Nasik
- Symbiosis Institute of Telecom Management (SITM), Pune
- Xavier Institute of Management & Entrepreneurship (XIME), Bengaluru

BB

- Bhara Vidyapeeth University, Institute of Management & Research, Delhi
- Department of Business Management, Osmania University (OU), Hyderabad
- Department of Commerce & Management Studies, University of Pune (PUMBA), Pune
- Department of Management Studies (DOMS), Anna University, Chennai
- ICFAI B-School (IBS), Mumbai
- International Management Institute (IMI), Bhubaneswar
- IMM-FOSTIIMA B-School, New Delhi
- Institute of Management Technology (IMT), Nagpur
- Institute of Technology & Management (ITM), Navi Mumbai
- Pondicherry Central University (PCU), Puducherry
- School of Petroleum Management, Pandit Deendayal Petroleum University, Gandhinagar, Gujarat
- Symbiosis Center for Information Technology (SCIT), Pune
- Symbiosis School of Banking & Finance (SSBF), Pune
- Welingkar Institute of Management (We), Bengaluru
- Xavier Institute of Management & Research (XIMR), Mumbai

B+

- Amrita School of Business (ASB), Coimbatore
- Balaji Institute of Modern Management (BIMM), Pune
- Bhara ya Vidya Bhavan's Usha & Lakshmi Memorial Institute of Management, Delhi
- Chetna's R. K. Institute of Management Studies & Research, Mumbai
- IES Management College & Research Centre, Mumbai
- Institute of Management Technology (IMT), Hyderabad
- Institute of Public Enterprise (IPE), Hyderabad
- International Management Institute (IMI), Kolkata
- Lala Lajpat Rai Institute of Management, Mumbai
- MET's Institute of Management, Mumbai
- National Institute of Technology (NIT) Calicut
- N. L. Dalmia Institute of Management Studies & Research (NLDIMSR), Mumbai
- Rajagiri Centre for Business Studies, Kochi
- Rizvi Institute of Management Studies & Research, Mumbai
- SDM Institute for Management Development (SDM-IMD), Mysore
- Siva Sivani Institute of Management (SSIM), Hyderabad

- Symbiosis Institute of Mass Communication (SIMC), Pune
- Thakur Institute of Management Studies & Research, Mumbai
- Vignana Jyothi Institute of Management (VJIM), Hyderabad
- Xavier Institute of Social Service (XISS), Ranchi

B

- Amity Business School, Noida
- B. K. School of Business Management, Ahmedabad
- Badruka College – Post Graduate Center (OU–affiliated MBA), Hyderabad
- Bhara Vidyapeeth's Institute of Management Studies & Research, Mumbai
- Christ Institute of Management, Ghaziabad
- Christ Institute of Management, Pune
- Fortune Institute of International Business, New Delhi
- IFIM Business School, Bengaluru
- Institute of Management Development & Research (IMDR), Pune
- Kirloskar Institute of Advanced Management Studies (KIAMS), Harihar
- MIT School of Management, Pune PSG Institute of Management, Coimbatore
- R. A. Podar Institute of Management, Jaipur
- School of Communication & Management Studies (SCMS), Kochi
- School of Management (SMS), Cochin University of Science & Technology, Kochi
- Symbiosis Institute of Business Management (SIBM), Hyderabad
- SSN School of Management & Computer Applications, Chennai
- St Francis Institute of Management and Research (SFIMR), Mumbai
- Symbiosis Institute of Computer Studies and Research (SICSR), Pune
- Symbiosis Institute of Health Sciences (SIHS), Pune
- University of Petroleum & Energy Studies (UPES), Dehradun
- University School of Management Studies – Indraprastha University, Delhi
- Vanguard Business School, Bengaluru
- Vivekanand Education Society's Institute of Management Studies & Research, Mumbai
- Xavier Institute of Management & Entrepreneurship (XIME), Kochi

Others

- Acharya Institute of Management Studies, Bengaluru
- Army Institute of Management, Kolkata
- Birla Global University – Bhubaneswar (formerly BIMTECH Bhubaneswar)
- Birla Institute of Technology (BIT), Mesra, Ranchi
- Dhruva College of Management, Hyderabad
- Gitam School of International Business (GSIB), Visakhapatnam
- Globsyn, Kolkata ICFAI B-School (IBS), Ahmedabad
- Indian Institute of Finance (IIF), New Delhi
- Indian Institute of Tourism & Travel Management (IITTM), Gwalior
- Indian School of Mines (ISM), Dhanbad Indira Institute of Management, Pune
- Indus Business Academy, Bengaluru ISME, Bengaluru Jaipuria Institute of Management Lucknow
- M. S. Ramiah Institute of Management, Bengaluru
- Mohanlal Nehru National Institute of Technology (MNNIT), Allahabad
- National Institute of Technology (NIT), Durgapur
- National Institute of Technology (NIT), Suratkal
- National Institute of Technology (NIT), Warangal
- New Delhi Institute of Management (NDIM), New Delhi
- St Joseph's College of Business Administration, Bengaluru
- Symbiosis School of Media & Communication (SSMC), Bengaluru
- Vishwa Vishwani Institute of Systems & Management, Hyderabad
- VIT Business School, Vellore

How to increase the number of attempts in the CAT

Posted on [March 27, 2018](#) by [admin](#)

The most important thing which determines the success or failure of a candidate in any exam is the score obtained. This holds good for the CAT as well; as you know, the CAT is the first step towards securing an admission in the esteemed Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs).

Two factors further determine the score obtained – the number of attempts and accuracy. We know that these two are not independent of each other. They behave like arch foes most of the time. If one tries to increase the number of attempts, accuracy gets hurt (pun intended). If the focus is on accuracy, the number of attempts goes down.

Question Selection

Is there a way out for you to turn these two arch foes into friends? The simple answer is: Yes! If there is any way, it has to be only this. You need to ensure that you attempt and answer all the easy questions in each section within the time allotted for the section, which is 60 minutes (as per the CAT 2016). Once you have solved the easy questions, you can proceed to answering the more difficult ones, if time permits. To be able to do this, one has to attempt questions selectively, judging their difficulty level while reading them. The cardinal rule is not to miss out on any easy question in the test. How many times did you realise that you have missed out on some easy questions in the test? Forget about not answering them, there could be some easy questions which you did not even look at. This is a gross mistake in the context of the CAT.

So, how do you ensure you do not miss out on easy questions? You have to look at each question and decide immediately, based on the area/topic/concept of the question and your familiarity with it, whether the question could be attempted or dropped. Only those questions that look doable should be attempted. This way you can reach the end of the paper within the stipulated time and hence ensure that no easy question gets missed out. After reaching the end of the paper, a second pass should be made to pick the easier questions out of those that are left. You could make as many passes as necessary to ensure that the easiest of the remaining questions are attempted.

Thus, you will ensure that at any point in time, you are working only on the easiest questions in the paper.

Two questions would have popped into your head:

How will I know if a particular Question is doable?

Practice and exposure are the main drivers here. The more practice you put in, the more questions and question types you are exposed to and hence better is the chance you will come across some of them in the exam.

How will I reach the end of the paper in time?

As you will train your mind to refuse to attempt any question that appears difficult, you will attempt only the seemingly easy questions. Let us assume the easy questions to be around 15 in number. You would not need more than 3045 minutes in a best-worst (two-three minutes per easy question) case scenario to reach the end of the paper. In any case, if the number of easy questions is less than 15, you will reach the end of the paper earlier.

If the number of easy questions is more, you will reach the end of the paper till about 30 such questions in the best case scenario and till about 20 questions in the worst. Regardless, be happy – you don't have to look that harder now as there are many easy questions.

Please read the paragraph below and then try to internalise it along with that above.

You would have seen many of the AIMCAT scores/percentiles by now. Some of you may also have seen the actual scores of CAT 2015. You would realise that 99 percentile has been hovering in the 55-65 percentage range. That would mean that one can answer around 75 per cent of the questions and expect to fall in 99 percentile range. This would tell you that if you leave the 25% unattempted questions out, you have one hour per section for about 25-26 questions. This is taking the time available per question up drastically from about 1.7-1.8 minutes (if you count all the questions in a section) to about 2.4 minutes. Hence, a scenario which is between the best and worst cases described above will work best for you and put you in the 99+ percentile range. Pushing it beyond that needs 'that' additional bit of hardwork.

So, how will the question selection turn the arch foes into friends?

Let us see. You have answered only the easy questions in the paper at any point in time. By definition an easy question is called so because it takes less time to solve. Hence, naturally the number of attempts go up. Also, because the question is easy, the chances of your getting it wrong also go down, specifically compared to the 'not-easy' questions. There we go – we are pushing both the number of attempts and accuracy up at the same time.

A couple of additional pointers on question selection

The question which you have is – to attempt the questions based on the difficulty level, should we scan the paper first, or answer them on-the-go based on the difficulty level. The answer would depend on the section you are working out. For a section like Verbal Ability, it doesn't make sense to come back to the questions after scanning them as most of them can either be answered or left out in the first reading.

But for Quantitative Ability section, the constraints are different. The questions can be, in the first reading, left to be solved later when one identifies all the easy questions in the paper. But the disadvantage in doing this will be that there would be duplication of effort in terms of reading the same question(s). This is because by the time the scan is over and one comes back to the first question, the information on the question will not stay in one's mind and the question has to be read again. To avoid this, you can divide the allotted time for the section into different chunks (for example – divide the 60 minutes into four chunks of 15 minutes each) and in each 15minute chunk, focus on a set of questions to be scanned for difficulty level and attempted. This way, you can ensure that no question goes unread and also ensure that all the easy-to-medium questions are attempted.

A similar approach can be followed for DILR section, and the advantage is that most questions here would be pre-divided into sets, making your task easier.

All said and done, your state of mind which will play a key role in the exam. Keep a cool head, ignore all the hype and hoopla going around you and focus only on doing well in the CAT.

All the best!

How to do well in QA

Posted on [March 27, 2018](#) by [admin](#)

If there is anything that has the potential to upset the confidence of the maximum number of the CAT aspirants in any given year, then it would be the very mention of 'Quantitative Ability'. This area of the CAT has, over the years, managed to evoke a formidable image in the minds of most serious aspirants vying for admission into one of the prestigious IIMs or some of the other top MBA colleges in the country. As we delve into the details of how to tame this monster of an area, let us first try to get a perspective on what exactly QA is all about and how it is relevant for an exam like the CAT.

To begin with, we need to understand that the name 'Quantitative' Ability can more appropriately be thought of as 'Problem Solving' Ability, something which, intuitively at least, everyone of us can relate to, without having to conjure up a gory mental image of complicated mathematical formulas, abstruse equations and a scratch paper that looks more like a mini battlefield, albeit doused with ink!

Yes, problem solving is something we all do, most of the time, the only exception being we use facts, common sense and our judgment instead of mathematical formulas, concepts and equations.

Now, the kind of expertise an exam like the CAT requires when it talks of Quantitative Ability, is very unlike the dry, academic and vague kind, which one would have encountered in their bulky mathematics text books during their school days and perhaps even later.

The questions featured in an exam like the CAT are mostly application-oriented and test one's grasp of the fundamentals in areas like arithmetic and algebra and, more importantly, one's ability to use information/concepts in an integrated manner, i.e., questions can sometimes be based on more than one topic and need a combination of concepts to crack them. For example, a question may simultaneously involve concepts of both 'Geometry' and 'Time & Distance'. The questions usually do not get very technical in terms of the concepts but they are definitely challenging in terms of the manner in which one can

1. comprehend the information or the circumstances given in the problem
2. correlate them to known concepts, and then
3. find the solution to the problem.

The third aspect, i.e., the actual solving process, is rarely lengthy or complicated and it is the first two aspects that are the most critical to cracking the QA section in an exam like the CAT.

Now the next logical question one would have is, 'How important is it that I know Quantitative Ability well?' or, more directly put, 'What is the weightage given to Quantitative Ability in the CAT?'

The exact weightage of this area in the various management entrance exams varies between one-fourth to one-third of the total marks. The CAT, for more than a decade now, has accorded close to one-third weightage to Quantitative Ability.

Most of the premier institutes have a cut-off for the QA section of the CAT that could be as high as 85 percentile or more. Given the fact that QA is a separate section by itself, one really has to manage a decent performance in QA (i.e., figure among the top 10 to 15 per cent of the test-takers in terms of their overall score in the QA section) to ensure that one clears the sectional cutoff to qualify for the next stage of the selection process. Intimidating as this may appear, it is in fact not as bad as it looks.

After having, thus far, gained an appreciation of what exactly QA in the CAT is all about, we will now be looking at what exactly it takes to manage a good performance in this area. We will focus on

some tips on getting the right perspective and maintaining the right mindset during your preparation for QA, a broad plan of action for the coming months, some tips for preparation and a few test taking strategies for maximising your performance during the actual exam.

Overall Approach and Attitude

With just a few months to go for the CAT 2017, there is just enough time for you to lay down a good foundation for yourself in QA and then to go on to build a sound strategy for tackling it in the CAT with a view to maximise your performance.

To begin with, you would already have started the ground work required in terms of covering some of the basics in the classroom and also practicing the concepts at home. If you are not doing either of these, then you are either not serious about your CAT prep OR you are probably new to the CAT and are planning for a serious attempt in the next year or two – in which case, I would seriously recommend that you enroll yourself for a structured training programme, keeping in mind the tremendous competition you would be facing.

However, if you are actually targeting this year's CAT but are not feeling very excited about it and are not putting in any proper effort toward it, then to begin with, I suggest you do some serious 'soul searching' until you find your purpose and motivation to move ahead.

What follows is a suggested approach that you could take to ensure that your mind stays focused and tuned-in and your preparation is optimised for maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

Develop a Sense of Purpose

Have you ever tried accomplishing a task, especially something not very easy or something that does not come naturally to you, without really being fully convinced as to why it was necessary for you? Well, let me tell you that to have to do something that you are not really convinced about, in other words, something that you do not have a sense of purpose for, is amongst the most difficult things one could ever endeavor to accomplish.

The key point to note is that the real difficulty does not lie in the task itself; rather it lies in your lack of motivation and clarity as to what the task really means to you. They say, you can drag a horse to the water but you cannot make it drink! I do not mean to say that someone else has dragged you into preparing for the CAT (or did they?!) but what I mean to say is that you should not be so lacking in motivation that you end up dragging yourself (figuratively speaking) into preparing for the CAT, in this case, more specifically into preparing for QA.

Of course, if the horse itself is thirsty then no one needs to even drag it to the water in the first place, for it will not only find the water on its own but will also not lose a moment in quenching its thirst. So you need to develop a thirst for learning and mastering QA. This is especially true for those who do not consider themselves to be very good at QA, those with non-math background and those with a phobia of anything that is even remotely related to QA! Now, if you do not happen to fall into any of the above types of people then you must be already good at math, if not a complete math-freak outright. However, even for such of you, what is required is to put your QA preparation in perspective and to visualise how it will help you achieve some of your greatest ambitions in life, or at least in your professional life. Now, you need to see and appreciate the big picture and understand that the primary purpose of all this hard work and prep is to help you crack the CAT and make it to a top b-school. This, in turn, will be a great spring board from where to launch your career, for which only the sky would then be the limit! Besides this you need to internalise the fact that a sharp and analytical mind with good problem solving skills (not always QA problems) is a great asset in real life, be it the corporate world or personal life. Working out QA problems and practicing good quality questions is a great way to flex those otherwise atrophying grey cells of ours – let's admit it, most of us get away in

life using only a fraction of our mental capacity – and develop a sharp and incisive mind that can see through to the core of the problems we come across, be it real life issues or just business and numbers related. All these advantages should help you to regularly keep yourself motivated and maintain a sense of purpose that will drive your preparation and keep you going through those tough times of doubt and despair, which are bound to come in more than once over the next few months.

Let Commitment and Hardwork by your Fuel

Thomas Alva Edison, one of the greatest inventors in history, once said: “The three great essentials to achieve anything worthwhile are, first, hard work; second, stick-to-itiveness; third, common sense.” Now, I want to emphasise the importance of commitment and hard work when you set out to accomplish something.

Commitment is believing in something and the willingness to single-mindedly devote yourself to whatever it takes to accomplishing it.

Hard work, in turn, can be thought of as the actual hours that you will put in and all the midnight oil that needs to be burnt. Depending on where your skill levels in QA stand, you will need to proportionately plan for anywhere between one to two hours per day toward your QA preparation. If making time every day is not feasible for you, then you should at least plan for one or two marathon sessions of four hours or more on the weekends. Also, resolve not to get distracted or lose focus during your study time, for an ill-focused study time cannot really help you to learn and build on your concepts. You will only end up studying fruitlessly, in a fragmented manner, just because you have to and most likely end up frustrated with it all.

Also, attend as many of your classes as you can and do not miss out on them without proper reason. Ensure that you regularly practice at home whatever you learn in the classroom. This kind of commitment and hard work will definitely multiply

your chances of fulfilling your ambitions of making it to an IIM, or at least one of the other top b-schools, manifold.

Be Confident and Persevere

The second thing that Edison had mentioned, i.e., stick-to-it-iveness, can, in other words, be understood as perseverance. Edison himself was one of the most unsuccessful of inventors before he turned into the most successful. In one of his attempts, where he was trying to improvise on the light bulb, he is said to have failed more than a thousand times before he could succeed!

The reason I mention this is that since the AIMCAT season is now underway, you may, from time to time, encounter some stark and not so encouraging reviews (read AIMCAT results) of your levels of preparedness, and along with that are bound to come moments of despair and discouragement. When that happens, my advice for you is not to look upon it as a portent of doom but to rather take it positively, in your stride, as honest, and more importantly, valuable feedback and an opportunity to identify your weak areas and to improve your level of preparation.

The importance of persevering despite seemingly insurmountable difficulties cannot be overemphasised. Persevering in times of hardships and seeming failures is the hallmark of successful people. Remember what Oliver Goldsmith said: “Our greatest glory consists not in failing, but in rising up every time we fall”.

The point to be noted is that the only aspect that is under your control in a competitive exam like the CAT is your own performance and maximising it is what is required, without letting the competition discourage you. Remember that the competition (reflected in terms of poor percentiles in your

AIMCATs), is your enemy only on the D-Day and on every other occasion before that the competition is actually your best friend and your failures, your sure stepping stones to success! So you need to keep your confidence levels high and spirits soaring till you achieve what you've set out to.

Prefer Quality and Quantity

The third aspect that Edison mentioned, i.e., common sense, can in this case, be understood as the quality of your effort. Quality of preparation is something that is really underrated by many CAT aspirants. But in fact, the real difference between a serious aspirant with high chances of cracking the CAT and other aspirants who end up as also-rans is quality, i.e., smart work rather than mere hard work; for many work hard but only a few work smart. We all know the famous proverb that says that doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results qualifies as insanity. So when you are putting in hours of commitment into your preparation every week, then you must ensure that you are spending those hours in the right manner. Many students just 'complete' all the study material that they can lay their hands on and then are out on a perennial search for more practice material, only to rush through it and 'finish' it as soon as they can get hold of it! This is probably the most unproductive way of spending your precious time.

The learning lies not in solving as many questions as you can but in maximising your understanding from each question that you solve. You need to dissect and analyse each question that you solve, especially the more difficult ones, so that you may understand the nuances of the topic and improve your skill and knowledge.

It also helps to revisit your exercises and test papers, a few weeks or months after you first cover them, to pore over them afresh and see if you remember the previous take-aways and also if there are any new ones that you may glean from them. You need to try to figure out alternative approaches to solving the same questions, develop an ability to identify patterns / peculiarities in solving different models of questions and identify steps / concepts where you tend to falter often and fix them. Also, it is advisable to discuss your approaches with faculty or friends and see if you missed anything. The quality aspect of your preparation is so critical that it may in fact make or break your chances of success.

Pacing your Preparation

Let us now look at a broad, month wise study plan, using which you can pace yourself over for the coming months.

July – August

Basic Study Material: Your Basic Study Material covers the basics and practice exercises for all the topics in QA relevant for the CAT. Ensure that you work out the exercises for each topic that is covered in class. In fact, you would have already covered most of the topics in class with only a few topics to go. Aim to finish the basics of all the topics by end of August.

QATs: For each topic covered in class, work out the QAT related to it.

Online Practice Tests: Work out all the basic level QA sectional tests available on your student home page related to the topics which you have covered in class. Also work out some of the intermediate level tests that are available. **AIMCATs:** Take the AIMCATs that are conducted every week, without fail. For each AIMCAT taken, ensure that you assess and analyse your performance in QA giving yourself sufficient time for this purpose.

September

Basic Study Material: Complete any remaining topics that you may not have completed yet. QATs and TGs: Work out the QATs related to the remaining topics and the Test Groups.

Online Practice Tests: Complete all the basic and intermediate level QA sectional tests available on the student home page. Work out at least a few of the advanced level tests also.

Advanced level SM (101712): Start working out some of the exercises from the SM. AIMCATs: Continue to take the AIMCATs regularly, always following up with proper analysis of your performance.

October

Advanced level SM (101712): Continue to work out the exercises from the SM. Online Practice Tests: Work out more of the advanced level tests. AIMCATs: Continue to take the AIMCATs regularly. In the second week of October, do a comprehensive, topic-wise review of all the QA questions of the AIMCATs that you have taken so far.

Advanced level SM (101712): Try to complete all the exercises from the SM. Online Practice Tests: Work out the remaining advanced level tests

November

Advanced level SM (101712): Try to complete all the exercises from the SM. Online Practice Tests: Work out the remaining advanced level tests.

AIMCATs: Continue to take the AIMCATs regularly. In the first week of November, do a comprehensive, topic-wise review of all the QA sections of the AIMCATs that you have taken since your last review.

CAT: Crack the CAT!

Test taking Tips

Finally, let us look at some test-taking tips for maximising your scores during tests. When it comes to a test-taking approach, one of the most important aspects you should remember is that there will always be a certain number of direct or simple questions in the QA section that are easy and doable, and identifying and cracking such questions is a major part of the challenge. Here are some practical tips that will help you during the exam time.

First, be disciplined and focussed in your approach, as it will help you maintain a cool head and give you much required control and confidence during the CAT. Often, a lack of discipline is the greatest negative factor that could pull down one's performance.

Second, remember that there are no marks for trying and neither are there any extra marks for solving more difficult questions. Hence, make sure you do not waste your time on questions that seem either difficult or unfamiliar – you can always return to such questions, time permitting.

When you are tackling the QA section, approach the questions in a group wise manner. This means that you first read through a group of four to five QA questions at a time, by using the 'next' and 'previous' buttons in the online interface, before actually delving into any of them. This will help you choose the right question(s) to attempt, and thereby help you optimise your time and number of attempts. Out of about five questions, consider attempting just around two or three questions. Consider attempting more only if you find them really easy.

Also, while attempting any question, first put down all the given information in a structured manner, after which you will be in a position to decide whether you can proceed further or whether you should leave that question and move on. Try to check for alternative approaches like elimination/substitution of choices, which often save a lot of time and pay rich dividends. These can be mastered only through practice. Further, an important aspect of the CAT is the on-screen calculator provided during the test. While the utility of the calculator in a section like QA would be much less when compared to a section like DILR, there may still be some questions where using the calculator would help save time, if not completely solve them. In order to make the most of the features, you should ensure that you get enough practice with it.

You should also actively mark questions for review, if you think that you may be able to solve them with some more effort, so that, time permitting, you could come back to look at them. This way, you would be working through the 34 QA questions in around seven groups of about five questions each. And each group should take you about 5 to 6 minutes, on an average, thereby completing one round of the section in 35 to 40 minutes. And by then you would have attempted anywhere from 14 to 18 questions already, with at least another 20 minutes or so to return to the questions marked for review. In fact, this strategy of managing about 15 to 20 minutes of spare time will work wonders for you if you implement it well, wherein the extra time at the end could also bring another 8 to 10 questions into play.

At the end of the day, you need to remember that a level- and cool-headed approach will make all the difference. So, give it your best and do not worry too much about the result, at least not while you are taking the exam!

Best wishes from all of us at **T.I.M.E.!**

