

PCAT Format

The Pharmacy College Admission Test (PCAT) is composed of 240 multiple choice questions and 2 writing assignments. Candidates will receive about four hours to complete the test. Multiple choice items will be given in direct question or fill-in-the-blank format; each item will be accompanied by four possible answers.

The PCAT is divided into seven subtests, issued in the following order: Writing (part I), Verbal Ability, Biology, Chemistry, Writing (part II), Reading Comprehension, and Quantitative Ability.

The Writing responses will be judged in terms of problem-solving skills and the effective use of the conventions of language, and must be completed within 30 minutes. The Verbal Ability subtest assesses nonscientific vocabulary and usage; it is composed of analogies (60%) and sentence completion exercises (40%). This subtest has 48 items and must be completed within 30 minutes.

The Biology subtest assesses mastery of the basic concepts of biology, including general biology, microbiology, human anatomy, and human physiology. It must be completed within 30 minutes and is comprised of 48 items; general biology makes up 60% of the exam, microbiology makes up 20%, and anatomy and physiology make up the remaining 20%.

The Chemistry subtest assesses knowledge of the basic principles of elementary organic and inorganic chemistry. It is composed of 48 items, which must be completed within 30 minutes; general chemistry makes up 60% of the subtest, while the remaining 40% is devoted to organic chemistry.

The Reading Comprehension subtest assesses the candidate's ability to understand and evaluate science-related reading passages. It is composed of 48 multiple-choice questions concerning six separate reading passages, and must be completed within 50 minutes. 30% of the questions will test comprehension; 40% will test analytical skills; and the remaining 30% will assess the ability to evaluate the passages.

The Quantitative Ability subtest assesses mathematical skills and quantitative reasoning in the areas of basic math, algebra, probability, statistics, pre-calculus, and calculus. This subtest consists of 48 items which must be completed within 40 minutes; basic math skills make up 15% of the exam content, algebra makes up 20%, probability and statistics make up another 20%, pre-calculus makes up 22%, and the final 22% focuses on calculus. It should be noted that some of the items in each multiple-choice section are experimental, meaning that they are used to develop future versions of the exam and do not contribute to the exam score. It will be impossible to determine which questions are experimental.

PCAT Test Review

Although the Pharmacy College Admissions Test (PCAT) is meant to be at an undergraduate level, most candidates will want to review the basic material to be covered before sitting for the exam. Indeed, even those candidates who have learned all of the appropriate material in their college courses are benefited by a brief review session. The appropriate means of reviewing for the PCAT will vary by subtest. To prepare for the Writing subtests, students may want to practice composing brief persuasive essays on both scientific and non-scientific subjects within the required time constraints.

For the Biology, Chemistry, and Quantitative Ability subtests, students should review the specific content that will appear on the PCAT: general biology; microbiology; human anatomy and physiology; general chemistry; inorganic chemistry; basic math; algebra; probability and statistics; pre-calculus; and calculus. It may be useful for students to practice answering a certain number of multiple-choice questions on these subjects in a certain amount of time, to prepare for the time requirements on test day. In order to prepare for the Verbal Ability subtest, candidates may want to review lists of common vocabulary, remembering that the words found in this subtest will not be scientific jargon. In particular, students may want to familiarize themselves with the structure of the analogy exercises.

Finally, candidates may prepare for the Reading Comprehension subtest of the PCAT by reading and considering some short scientific journal articles. The six passages in this subtest will be examples of technical scientific writing, a genre which has its own conventions. Candidates will want to be skilled at analyzing and evaluating such texts before sitting for the PCAT.