

CAT Syllabus and Preparation Tips





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1. Common Admission Test (CAT): A Brief Overview

CAT is the most popular management entrance test conducted for admission to PGDM/MBA programmes offered by 20 IIMs and hundreds of other B-schools of India. It is a computer-based test facilitated by one of the old IIMs on a rotational basis. Lakhs of aspirants appear for CAT every year with the hope of securing a seat in one of the leading MBA colleges.

CAT essentially checks your dexterity in tackling questions of quantitative aptitude, data interpretation, verbal ability, and logical reasoning. While most of the entrance tests are speed-based, CAT is more inclined to test your complexity-handling skills. Considered one of the toughest entrance tests, CAT can be nailed with a well-laid study plan and efficient exam strategy.

1.1. Eligibility for CAT

CAT is taken by students of all educational backgrounds and qualifications. Yet, there are certain eligibility conditions that you must fulfill prior to applying for the exam. In this regard, you should keep the following points in mind:



- Candidate must have a Bachelor's degree/ equivalent from a recognized university/board.
- Candidate must have done his/her Bachelor's degree/ equivalent with atleast 50% marks (general category)/ 45% (reserved category).

Even the students in the final year of their graduation can apply for CAT. Further, there are no restrictions on age or the number of attempts for the exam.

1.2 Exam Pattern & Marking Scheme

CAT is composed of three sections that consist of both MCQs and non-MCQs. The exam is a blend of moderate and difficult questions based on fundamental topics. Since the last few years, CAT exam has seen some modifications, the latest being the reduction in total questions from 100 to 76. Illustrated below is the detailed break-up of CAT Exam Pattern:

CAT Sections	No. of Questions	Marks	Time Limit (minutes)
Verbal Ability & Reading Comprehension (VARC)	26	78	40
Data Interpretation & Logical Reasoning (LRDI)	24	72	40
Quantitative Aptitude (QA)	26	78	40
Total	76	228	120



Listed below are some prominent features of CAT exam structure and marking format:

- The first section in CAT is generally VARC, followed by VARC, and QA at last.
- The sectional order is fixed, and you cannot navigate from one section to another without submitting the current one.
- For each right answer (MCQs and Non-MCQs), three marks are awarded, and one mark is deducted for every wrong MCQ.
- There is no negative marking in Non-MCQs.
- There is no penalty for unattempted questions.
- The number of MCQs and non-MCQs varies every year. Both types of questions are asked in all three sections.
- Almost 27-33% of the total questions in CAT are non-MCQs.



2. CAT Syllabus

IIMs do not prescribe any standard syllabus for CAT exam. However, we have created a list of important topics based on the pattern followed in the last few years. The weightage of all sections is more or less the same. Although the range of CAT syllabus is quite vast, certain topics make a regular appearance in the exam. The given table gives a glimpse of the crucial areas of CAT Syllabus:

2.1 Main Areas of CAT

Sections	Topics	Weightage (approx.)
VARC	Para-jumbles, Para-Summary, Long & Short RC Passages	34.2%
DILR	Tables, Bar Graphs, Caselets, Seating Arrangement, Syllogism, Venn Diagrams	31.6%
QA	Geometry, Number System, Arithmetic, Mensuration, Algebra, Commercial Maths	34.2%

2.2 Section-wise Syllabus of CAT

Here, you will get to know the significance of each topic of CAT syllabus, as per the different sections:



2.3 Verbal Ability & Reading Comprehension (VARC)

In the VARC section, Reading Comprehensions form the major proportion with almost 70% of the total questions. Apart from that, there are questions from para-jumbles, para-summary, and similar other topics. Explained below are the types of questions based on the common topics of VARC:

➤ **Para-Jumbles**

As the name states, para-jumbles are basically a set of sentences given in random order. You are expected to sort the sentences properly so that the complete paragraph clearly conveys a specific idea. A good way to tackle these is to identify the introductory and conclusive sentences that would form the first and last sentence of the paragraph, respectively.

➤ **Para-Summary**

Summary questions consist of a small passage (100 words or less). In this, you have to choose the best summary option or write one (in the case of non-MCQ). The key to spotting the correct answer is to select the one that doesn't deviate or negate the theme of the passage.



➤ Reading Comprehension

RC passages are fetched from a variety of fields like economics, business, science, history, culture, psychology, etc. These may also be based on current national and international events as well as abstract topics. While some passages are short (300-600 words), others are of longer length (700-900 words). RC questions mostly test your knowledge of vocabulary and skills in deducing inferences and facts from passages. Some of the questions also relate to the central idea of passage and tone of the author. There are 4-5 RC passages in CAT accompanied by 4-5 questions each.

In addition to the above-mentioned topics, VARC includes various other topics. The following table elucidates the importance of different topics in CAT:

Topic	No. of Questions in CAT
RC-based	18-20
Para-Jumbles	2-4
Para-Summary	2-4
*Other topics	1-2

*Sentence Completion/Correction, Odd-one out, Fill in the blanks, Analogies, Critical Reasoning, Vocabulary-Based, etc.



2.4 Data Interpretation & Logical Reasoning (LRDI)

DILR is quite an unpredictable section of CAT, mainly because of its great variety of question sets. It is regarded as the most challenging section of the exam. Unlike the quantitative part, DILR doesn't rely on any standard formulas. The weightage of DI sets is slightly more than LR sets and questions. Nevertheless, their number has varied every year, and you need to pay equal attention to both DI and LR topics. Given below is the description of important topics:

➤ Data Interpretation

DI portion comprises sets that represent data in the form of tables, graphs, charts, Venn diagrams, and other visual formats. To understand the information better, you will have to simplify the data and then solve the related questions. Some of the given data may be redundant or irrelevant for the questions, so you will have to sort it out accordingly. Although DI sets require heavy calculations, you can quickly find the answers using certain tricks, shortcuts, and approximation techniques.

In CAT, there are a total of 3-4 DI sets with 4-6 questions each.



➤ Logical Reasoning

LR part features in the form of sets or stand-alone questions. These are based on common reasoning concepts of arrangements, sequences, syllogisms, blood relations, connectives, calendars, clocks, etc. Some questions dwell on a combination of these concepts.

Usually, there are 1-3 sets of LR in CAT with 4-6 questions.

2.5 Quantitative Aptitude (QA)

QA questions are based on a wide range of topics, with the arithmetic part dominating the section. The fundamental concepts of arithmetic also extend to commercial maths and similar other topics. You need to develop a good speed and learn all the requisite formulas to ace the section. Illustrated below are the various major topics and sub-topics of QA, along with their weightage in CAT:



Main Topic	Sub-Topics	No. of Questions
Arithmetic	Percentages, Averages, Ratio and Proportion, Profit and Loss, Simple and Compound Interest, Time and Work, Mixtures and Allegations, TSD (Time, Speed, and Distance)	10-12
Number System	Factorization, Unit Digit, Divisibility, Binomial Theorem, Surds and Indices	3-5
Algebra	Linear Equations, Quadratic Equations, Inequalities, Functions, Logarithm, Complex Numbers	6-7
Geometry & Mensuration	Lines and Angles, Triangles, Polygons, Circles, Solids (3D Geometry), Coordinate Geometry, Trigonometry	4-6
Modern Math	Set Theory, Permutation, and Combination, Probability, etc.	2-3



3. CAT Preparation Strategy

Candidates generally devote 6 months to CAT preparation. Among the CAT takers, there are several working professionals, final year students, and fresh graduates of various streams. Depending upon your daily schedule, you must dedicate at least 2-4 hours to CAT preparation. The important thing is to follow a proper study plan and stay focused.

CAT preparation should essentially be divided into three major phases:

- I. Concept Building
- II. Revision
- III. Final Practice

In the initial 1-2 months, your aim should be to develop conceptual clarity of important topics. After you get a strong hold over the topics of all sections, start revising them through related practice exercises. So, in the second stage, you can practice chapter-wise tests, and then move on to the sectional tests.

Further, you should begin regular practice of full-length mock tests and previous year CAT papers. Alongside, keep a tab on your performance and identify your weak



and strong areas. In the final stage, you will be able to come up with strategies for different types of questions and sections. Here are some important things you must remember while preparing for CAT exam:

Tips for VARC

Verbal section demands a good vocabulary base, efficient reading skills, and grammatical proficiency. In order to master this section, you must follow the given approach:

- *Develop a regular habit of reading.* This will not only help you in RC passages, but also improve your vocabulary. Since RC passages are drawn from a variety of study disciplines, it is recommended that you indulge in diverse reading. Today, there are several easily accessible reading resources. Some of the suggested ones include good newspapers like The Hindu, Economic Times, and magazines like Business Today, etc. Besides, you can go through similar online websites and some good books.
- *Get familiar with grammatical rules and conventions.* Although majority of VARC questions are based on Reading Comprehension passages, there are a good number of questions on grammar too. So, if



you are aware of the fundamental rules, you can quickly answer these questions with complete accuracy.

- *Practice topic-wise and section-wise tests.* Since there are no fixed ways to deal with verbal questions, the best approach to build accuracy and speed in the section is to practice well. Mock tests and previous year papers serve as a good source for practising VARC questions. This is especially essential in the case of critical reasoning questions that are slightly tricky to handle.

Tips for DILR

DILR is generally the lengthiest section in CAT due to its calculation-intensive nature. Besides, most of the candidates find it complex and unpredictable. However, if you approach the section in a well-planned manner, you can crack it with a high score. Here are a few expert tips for preparing DILR section of CAT:

- *Know the types of DI and LR sets.* This section is mostly composed of sets in different formats like tables, charts, graphs, caselets, etc. As these questions carry a lot of data and information, it is likely to confuse the candidates if they are



unaware of the types. Further, when you can identify the type, you will know whether it should be avoided or not.

- *Simplify the given information.* Generally, DILR sets are presented with a lot of data, out of which a part of it is redundant. Once you are able to take out the useful information from a given data/reasoning set, you can write or draw it in a simpler form for your own understanding. This way, you will be able to solve the associated questions more easily.
- *Practice the required tricks.* It is not possible to complete the required number of DILR questions unless you are well-practised in using the shortcuts and related tricks. For example, instead of calculating the answer to a particular question, you can work out the answer from the given choices.

Tips for QA

Another tricky section of CAT exam, Quantitative aptitude entails adequate focus and practice during preparation. This section can turn out to be really scoring if you are well-versed with all the crucial topics and smart ways to solve the related questions. While



preparing for quant section, keep the following things in mind:

- *Clear the basics.* Quant section of CAT is completely fetched from the fundamental topics of mathematics. So, the first step to gaining expertise in QA questions is to learn the basic concepts and formulae. You will notice that you already know about most of these topics. However, you must take this stage seriously, as a good conceptual clarity can help you solve even the trickiest of all questions.
- *Learn the shortcut techniques.* Many of the quant questions are time-consuming and require heavy calculations. Therefore, you must be aware of mental calculation techniques, shortcut methods, approximation tricks, and related formulas. These tactics will help you speedily solve questions of almost all topics.
- *Practice and Analyse.* The obvious way to attain speed and accuracy in quant is to practice as much as possible. Yet, it won't be enough until you analyse your performance after every test. As you practice more and more tests, you will get to know about your weak and strong spots. Accordingly,



you can pay attention to strengthening your weak areas and modify your exam strategy. You must always start with the easiest and less time-consuming questions and then move on to the tougher and lengthy questions.

Further, the non-MCQ part of CAT can prove quite scoring if you handle it diligently. As these questions carry no negative marking, you can easily use guesswork to work out their answers. However, do not spend more than the required time on non-MCQs.

4. Conclusion

The entire CAT syllabus is based on the fundamental topics of maths, statistics, reasoning, and English. In other words, you don't need to be an expert in the aforementioned subjects but have a basic knowledge about them. However, the questions on these topics are tricky and complex, which means you need to do a good amount of practice and subsequent performance analysis. Eventually, you can devise a strategy that works best for you in the exam.