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- Strategies for answering every question type
- Essay writing help
- Expert coaching in all test topics

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# **PCAT**

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**PHARMACY COLLEGE ADMISSION TEST**

**George J. Hademenos, Ph.D.**

Shaun Murphree, Ph.D.

Jennifer M. Warner, Ph.D.

Kathy A. Zahler, M.S.

Mark A. Whitener, Ph.D.



New York | Chicago | San Francisco | Lisbon | London | Madrid | Mexico City | Milan | New Delhi  
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# How to Use This Book

Welcome to *McGraw-Hill's PCAT*. You've made the decision to pursue a career in pharmacy, you've studied hard, you've taken and passed difficult science courses, and now you must succeed on this very tough exam. We're here to help you.

This book has been created by a dedicated team of scientists, teachers, and test-prep experts. Together, they have helped thousands of students score high on all kinds of exams, from rigorous science tests to difficult essay-writing assignments. They have pooled their knowledge, experience, and test-taking expertise to make this the most effective PCAT preparation program available.

*McGraw-Hill's PCAT* contains a wealth of features to help you do your best. In the months, weeks, or days before you take the test, you can substantially improve your chances of scoring high by using this book as follows:

- In Part I, you'll learn basic facts about the test, be familiarized with the test format, and learn about the kinds of questions that you're going to encounter. You'll also find important tips about pacing and guessing. In addition, you can review some basic test-taking strategies to keep in mind throughout all phases of the exam.
- In Part II, you can take a half-length Diagnostic Test. The questions on this test follow the PCAT format and cover the same topics as the actual exam. When you finish the test, use the results to measure how well prepared you currently are to take the PCAT. You can also use the results to decide which topics to focus on during the course of your review.
- In Parts III through VII, you can review every subject you must know for the PCAT. Parts III through VII present detailed coverage of all tested topics in verbal skills, biology, chemistry, mathematics, and writing. Concise chapter summaries, "Cram Sessions," at the end of each chapter reiterate key terms and concepts for quick and effective review. Many also offer valuable advice for tackling PCAT questions in the particular topic area. Each science review ends with "On Your Own" practice quizzes that you can use as a fast, efficient way to test your mastery of the subject. Part VII covers the Writing section—the parts of the PCAT most dreaded by many test takers. Here you'll find numerous sample essays illustrating exactly what the graders are looking for. Read the samples carefully—and learn how you can score high on these difficult PCAT sections.
- In Part VIII, you'll find a complete sample PCAT for practice. This test presents questions spanning the entire range of subjects and difficulty levels you're likely to find

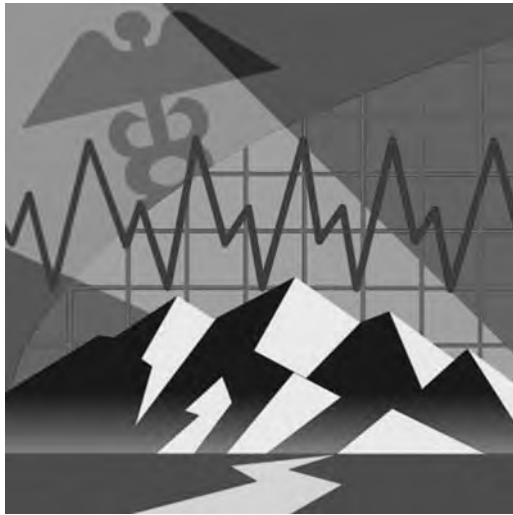
on the PCAT. Take the test under actual testing conditions: set aside the time you'll need to take the entire test at one sitting. Screen out distractions, and concentrate on doing your best. Of course, this practice test can provide only an approximation of how well you will do on the actual PCAT. However, if you approach it as you would the real test, it should give you a very good idea of how well you are prepared. After you take the test, read through the explanations for each question, paying special attention to those you answered incorrectly or had to guess on. If necessary, go back and reread the corresponding sections in the subject reviews in this book.

Different people have different ways of preparing for a test like the PCAT. You must find a preparation method that suits your schedule and your learning style. We have tried to make *McGraw-Hill's PCAT* flexible enough for you to use in a way that works best for you, but to succeed on this rigorous exam, there's no substitute for serious, intensive review and study. The more time and effort you devote to preparing, the better your chances of achieving your PCAT goals.

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**PART I**

**ALL ABOUT  
THE PCAT**



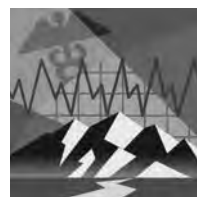
- 1. Introducing the PCAT**
- 2. Test Format and Structure**
- 3. General Test-Taking Strategies**

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# Introducing the PCAT



## Read This Chapter to Learn About:

- PCAT Basics
- Where and When to Take the PCAT
- How to Register for the PCAT
- Your PCAT Scores
- How Pharmacy Schools Use PCAT Scores
- Reporting Scores to Pharmacy Schools
- For Further Information

## PCAT BASICS

The Pharmacy College Admission Test (PCAT) is a standardized exam that is used to assess applicants to pharmacy schools. It is required as part of the admissions process by most U.S. pharmacy schools. The test is created and administered by Harcourt Assessment, the oldest commercial test publisher in the nation and a leader in the test development and publishing industry. The American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACCP) endorses the PCAT as the official preferred admissions test for entrance into pharmacy school.

The questions on the PCAT are basically designed to measure your problem-solving and critical-thinking skills. Three test sections assess your mastery of basic concepts in biology, chemistry, and quantitative ability. A fourth test section tests general, non-scientific word knowledge and usage. A fifth test section requires you to read passages on general topics and answer questions by applying your reasoning skills to what you have read. Finally, a sixth test section requires you to write two essays that demonstrate an effective use of language conventions and the ability to suggest the solution to a problem.

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## **WHERE AND WHEN TO TAKE THE PCAT**

The PCAT is offered at approximately 150 sites in the United States (including the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico) and at 12 sites in Canada. At the time of this writing, the PCAT had international test centers only in Canada and Qatar.

There are four test dates every year, in January, June, August, and October. The test day is always Saturday. Some test centers give the test in the morning only and others, usually larger, also provide an afternoon session.

It is a good idea to take the PCAT in the spring or summer of the year before the fall in which you plan to enroll in pharmacy school. That way, you have enough time to submit your scores to meet the schools' application deadlines.

For up-to-date lists of testing sites and also for upcoming test dates, make sure to check the official PCAT Web site at [www.PCATweb.info](http://www.PCATweb.info).

## **HOW TO REGISTER FOR THE PCAT**

You can register for the PCAT online at [www.PCATweb.info](http://www.PCATweb.info). Online registration is available until approximately 10 weeks before the test date. If you prefer to register by mail, you must call Harcourt Assessment/PSE Customer Relations to request the form and refer to the official PCAT Web site for test center codes and pharmacy school codes. It is a good idea to register early, because seating at the test centers may be limited and you want to make sure you get a seat at the center of your choice. When you register, you are charged a fee, which you can pay via credit card with online registration or via money order with paper registration.

## **YOUR PCAT SCORES**

When you take the PCAT, your work on each of the six test sections first receives a "raw score." On the five multiple-choice sections (Verbal Ability, Biology, Reading Comprehension, Chemistry, and Quantitative Ability), the raw score is calculated based on the number of questions you answer correctly. No points are deducted for questions answered incorrectly.

Each raw score is then converted into a scaled score. Using scaled scores helps to make test takers' scores comparable from one version of the PCAT to another. For the five multiple-choice sections (also referred to as subtests) and the composite for the whole multiple-choice test, scaled scores range from 200 (lowest) to 600 (highest). One of the writing sections will be experimental, meaning that it is being tested for future use and will not affect your score. The other writing section will have two recorded scores, one for Conventions of Language and one for Problem Solving from 0 (lowest) to 5.0 (highest).

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Your score report will be mailed to you within approximately six weeks of your date of testing. PCAT score reports also include percentile rankings for the multiple-choice test and a mean score for the writing section that show how well you did in comparison to others who took the same test.

## **HOW PHARMACY SCHOOLS USE PCAT SCORES**

Pharmacy school admission committees emphasize that PCAT scores are only one of several criteria that they consider when evaluating applicants. When making their decisions, they also consider students' college and university grades, recommendations, personal interviews, and involvement and participation in extracurricular or health-care-related activities. If the committee is unfamiliar with the college you attend, they may pay more attention than usual to your PCAT scores. A high score on the Writing Sample may also compensate for any weaknesses in communication skills noted on the application or at an interview.

There is no hard-and-fast rule about what schools consider to be an acceptable PCAT score. A scaled score of 400 corresponds to the fiftieth percentile of the PCAT. Pharmacy schools have their own judgments about a desirable PCAT score. Contact the programs to which you are applying to gauge what score you will need to be competitive for admission.

Note that PCAT scores are only valid for five years. Consult the pharmacy schools to which you are applying to confirm their individual policies on duration of test score validity.

## **REPORTING SCORES TO PHARMACY SCHOOLS**

Official transcripts of your PCAT scores are sent by Harcourt Assessment to the institutions to which you requested your scores reported. For a fee, additional official transcripts can be requested online or by mail.

## **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

For further information about the PCAT, visit the official PCAT Web site at

[www.PCATweb.info](http://www.PCATweb.info)

For questions about registering for the test, reporting and interpreting scores, and similar issues, you may also contact Harcourt Assessment/PSE Customer Service.



**PART I:  
ALL ABOUT  
THE PCAT**

**Telephone:**

1-800-622-3231

210-339-8710

**Fax:**

1-888-211-8276

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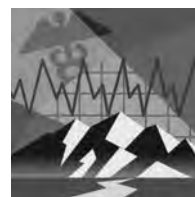
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San Antonio, TX 78259

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# Test Format and Structure



## Read This Chapter to Learn About:

- ▶ The Format of the Test
- ▶ The Verbal Ability and the Reading Comprehension Sections
- ▶ The Biology and Chemistry Sections
- ▶ The Quantitative Ability Section
- ▶ The Writing Section

## THE FORMAT OF THE TEST

The PCAT consists of seven separately timed sections. The test takes approximately four hours, in addition to administrative time for instructions at the beginning and a short rest break about halfway through the test. The morning session begins at 8:30 a.m. and ends at approximately 1:30 p.m. The afternoon session begins at 2:00 p.m.

The seven test sections are always given in the same order. The chart on the following page shows the sections in order, with the number of questions and time allowed for each section. There are a total of 240 questions and 2 essays on the test.

## THE WRITING SECTION

According to the testmakers, the purpose of the Writing section is to assess your ability to communicate clearly, logically, and persuasively—a skill that is essential for pharmacists who interact with colleagues and the public. The Writing section of the PCAT is designed to measure effective use of language conventions and the ability to suggest the solution to a problem. The writing topics will address problems related to general health or science, or social, cultural, or political issues.

You are required to write one short essay in each writing section. The time limit for each one is 30 minutes. For each one, you will be given an essay prompt in the form of a statement that presents a problem. Your job is to write an essay in which you accomplish the following tasks:

- Suggest a solution to the problem presented
- State a clear thesis
- Support your thesis with relevant examples from your academic studies, personal experience, etc.
- Use correct grammar, punctuation, and word choice
- Write legibly
- Analyze alternative solutions to the one that you are suggesting
- Allow time at the end of this section to proofread your work

Within the 30-minute time limit, you must organize your thoughts, plan your writing (perhaps by jotting down a quick outline on scratch paper), and write your essay. You do not necessarily have to produce a lengthy piece of writing, but you must write enough to accomplish the above tasks in a way that is cogent, logical, and effective.

The PCAT Writing section is given two scores, one for language conventions and one for problem solving. The language conventions score is for grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, diction, and mechanics. The problem solving score is for developing an effectively written argument, sufficiently explaining a solution to a problem, presenting relevant support, analyzing alternate solutions, and refraining from faulty reasoning.

**EXAMPLE:** The following is an example of a typical PCAT writing prompt.

Discuss a solution to the problem of parental concern about childhood vaccinations.

## **THE VERBAL ABILITY SECTION**

The Verbal Ability section of the PCAT is made up of 48 questions that are designed to measure general, nonscientific word knowledge and usage. This test section contains the following:

- Analogies
- Sentence completion

See Part III of this book for a complete review of these topics.

Test Section	Description	Time Limit	Number of Questions	
Writing	Measures the effective use of language conventions in a written essay. You may write either an argumentative or problem solving essay.	30 min	1 writing topic	
	Conventions of Language			
	Problem Solving			
Verbal Ability	Measures general, nonscientific word knowledge using analogies and sentence completion.	30 min	48 items	
	Analogies			60%
	Sentence Completion			40%
Biology	Measures knowledge of the principles and concepts of basic biology with major emphasis on human biology.	30 min	48 items	
	General Biology			60%
	Microbiology			20%
	Anatomy & Physiology			20%
Chemistry	Measures knowledge of principles and concepts of inorganic and elementary organic chemistry.	30 min	48 items	
	General Chemistry			60%
	Organic Chemistry			40%
<b>Rest Break</b>				
Writing	Measures the effective use of language conventions in a written essay. You may write either an argumentative or problem solving essay.	30 min	1 writing topic	
	Conventions of Language			
	Problem Solving			

**PART I:  
ALL ABOUT  
THE PCAT**

Test Section	Description	Time Limit	Number of Questions	
Reading Comprehension	Measures ability to comprehend, analyze, and interpret reading passages on scientific topics.	50 min	6 passages 48 items	
	Comprehension			30%
	Analysis			40%
	Evaluation			30%
Quantitative Ability	Measures skills in arithmetic processes including fractions, decimals, and percentages, and the ability to reason through and understand quantitative concepts and relationships, including application of algebra.	40 min	48 items	
	Basic Math			15%
	Algebra			20%
	Probability & Statistics			20%
	Precalculus			23%
	Calculus			22%

**EXAMPLES**

The following are examples of PCAT analogy and sentence completion questions.

Analogy question:

UMBRELLA : RAIN :: PARASOL :

- A. hail
- B. sun
- C. shade
- D. snow

Answer: **B**

Sentence completion question:

Since the mid-1960s, scientists have recognized that every dolphin has a \_\_\_\_\_ signature whistle, which is used for identification purposes.

- A. universal
- B. muted
- C. superfluous
- D. distinctive

Answer: **D**

## THE BIOLOGY AND CHEMISTRY SECTIONS

The Biology and Chemistry sections of the PCAT test your mastery of the concepts and principles of biology and chemistry as taught in typical undergraduate college courses with laboratory sessions. In order to correctly answer most PCAT science questions, you need to be able to use that knowledge and your own reasoning skills to analyze scientific information, interpret scientific data, and calculate the solutions to scientific problems. Each of the two sections contains 48 multiple-choice items.

### Biology

The testmakers list the following biology concepts as topics for questions in the PCAT Biology section:

- General biology
- Microbiology
- Human anatomy and physiology

See Part IV of this book for a complete review of these topics.

**EXAMPLE:** The following is an example of a PCAT biology question.

1. Which statement is true?

- A. A cell placed in an isotonic solution will swell.
- B. A cell placed in a hypotonic solution will swell.
- C. A cell placed in a hypotonic solution will shrink.
- D. A cell placed in a hypertonic solution will remain the same size.

Answer: **B**

### Chemistry

The testmakers list the following chemistry concepts as topics for questions in the PCAT Chemistry section:

- General chemistry
- Organic chemistry

See Part V of this book for a complete review of these topics.

**EXAMPLE:** The following is an example of a PCAT chemistry question.

1. Compare the Fischer and sawhorse projections below:



Assuming all conformations are available, the two depictions are best described as

- A. enantiomers.
- B. diastereomers.
- C. constitutional isomers.
- D. identical.

Answer: **B**

## The Reading Comprehension Section

The Reading Comprehension section of the PCAT is made up of 48 questions that are intended to measure ability to comprehend, analyze, and evaluate reading passages on science-related topics. This test section contains the following:

- Six reading passages, each of which is 500 to 600 words long
- Between five and eight multiple-choice questions per passage

The passages are taken from texts that you most likely have never seen before and may be on topics with which you are unfamiliar. However, do not be alarmed; you will not be asked questions that require any prior knowledge of the passage topic. Everything you need to know to answer each question will be included in the passage.

The questions in the Reading Comprehension section may ask you to do any of the following:

- Identify the main idea of the passage
- Analyze an argument presented in the passage and judge its validity
- Use information from the passage to solve a given problem
- Determine cause-and-effect relationships for events or conditions described in the passage
- Evaluate a claim made in the passage based on the strength of the evidence or argument provided to support that claim
- Identify the reasons or evidence offered in support of a particular viewpoint
- Recognize stated or unstated assumptions that underlie a viewpoint presented in the passage
- Identify new facts or results that might undermine a conclusion presented in the passage
- Apply information from the passage to a new situation
- Determine the meaning of an unfamiliar word based on its context

See Part III of this book for a complete review of these topics.

### EXAMPLE

The following is an example of a PCAT reading comprehension passage and related question.

- 1 For years, anecdotal evidence from around the world has indicated that amphibians were under siege, especially in the Caribbean. Finally, proof of this hypothesis is available, thanks to the concerted, Internet-based effort of scientists involved with the Global Amphibian Assessment.
  - 2 Amphibians have a unique vulnerability to environmental changes thanks to their permeable skin and their need of specific habitats to allow their metamorphosis from larva to adult. Studies indicate that they are at risk due to global climate change, reduction in the ozone layer leading to an increased exposure to ultraviolet rays, interference with migratory pathways, drainage of wetlands, pollution by pesticides, erosion and sedimentation, and exposure to unknown pathogens thanks to the introduction of nonnative species. In other words, human progress is responsible for the losses this population is suffering.
  - 3 Scientists have long considered amphibians a barometer of environmental health. In areas where amphibians are declining precipitously, environmental degradation is thought to be a major cause. Amphibians are not adaptable. They must have clean water in which to lay their eggs. They must have clean air to breathe after they grow to adulthood. Their “double life” as aquatic and land-dwelling animals means that they are at risk of a double dose of pollutants and other hazards.
  - 4 The Global Amphibian Assessment concluded that nearly one-third of the world’s amphibian species are under immediate threat of extinction. Nearly half of all species are declining in population. The largest numbers of threatened species are in Colombia, Mexico, and Ecuador, but the highest percentages of threatened species are in the Caribbean. In Haiti, for example, nine out of ten species of amphibians are threatened. In Jamaica, it’s eight out of ten, and in Puerto Rico, seven out of ten.
  - 5 Certainly, this is a disaster for amphibians, but scientists rush to point out that it may be equally a disaster for the rest of us on Earth. Even recent pandemics among amphibians may be caused by global changes. True, amphibians are ultrasensitive to such changes, but can reptiles, fish, birds, and mammals be far behind?
1. The main point of the passage is that
    - A. the extinction of amphibians is due to global warming.
    - B. amphibians really are a barometer of environmental health.
    - C. only equatorial amphibians are currently under siege.
    - D. amphibians’ “double life” on land and in water may end up saving them.

Answer: **B**



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