

HPAT Guide

How to do well in the HPAT



by Philippa Harold-Barry

Philippa Harold-Barry is studying Medicine in UCC. In this guide, she shares her top tips on doing well in the HPAT.



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Introduction

My name is Philippa Harold-Barry and I completed my Leaving Certificate in 2021. In this blog, I will attempt to give you a well-rounded overview of my own HPAT experience, which will hopefully help you navigate these confusing channels of becoming a doctor! I am now studying Medicine in UCC, meaning that I had to sit the dreaded HPAT in February of 2021. Chances are that if you are here, you have a rough idea about what the HPAT is all about.

According to Acer, the HPAT (Health Professions Admission Test) is an “admissions test used to assist with the selection of students into medicine and health professions degree programs” which “measures a candidate’s logical reasoning and problem-solving skills as well as nonverbal reasoning and the ability to understand the thoughts, behaviour and/or intentions of people”.

Ultimately, the HPAT was developed with the goal to assess the qualities considered to be desirable in health professionals including problem solving, empathy and abstract reasoning. I know this all sounds like a bit of a mouthful but fear not, by the end of this guide I’m confident that you will have a greater and deeper understanding of what is involved and most importantly have the belief that you can succeed in the HPAT.

I achieved 216 points, which was the 100th percentile in 2021, but I will definitely say that it wasn’t a linear journey for me, and I faced numerous challenges along the way. I’d love to pass on some of the tips and tricks I picked up along the way to make your HPAT journey just a little bit easier!

Exam Layout and Grading

Firstly, a comprehensive HPAT guide is already available on Studyclix, and I would recommend checking it out as the more points of view you can have in your arsenal the better. Aditi explains the percentile system extensively which is well worth glancing at.

One of the main things is not to worry about getting 100% in the HPAT as it is not graded in the same way as the Leaving Cert. You can do extremely well and not get all the answers correct! Aditi also breaks down the number of questions in each section but there's no harm in seeing it once again! So, to put it briefly...

There are **3 sections** with **110 questions**. It will take you approximately **2.5 hours** to complete the exam.

Section 1	44 questions	65 minutes
Section 2	36 questions	45 minutes
Section 3	30 questions	40 minutes

Exam Preparation

It may seem like the HPAT is a long way away, but trust me, it rolls around swiftly. Between Christmas exams and the Mocks, the weeks fly by. Hence, it's important that you keep an eye on the dates and ensure you prioritise some time for HPAT preparation. Keep an eye out for the registration date which is usually sometime in December.

Like many students who sit the HPAT, I used MedEntry in my preparation and I honestly could not recommend this enough. MedEntry offers a wide range of resources to students, who can choose between the various packages. Personally, I used the Platinum package which gave me full access to the online learning platform along with a 2-day workshop which I found very useful. MedEntry now also offers individual tutoring to students either in person or online and I am delighted to be working with MedEntry as a tutor this year. I think this is a great opportunity for students to get personal one-on-one feedback which will be invaluable in the lead up to HPAT.

Although the HPAT was typically an in person written exam, due to the current situation with the pandemic the exam took place online for me. Although I have no idea how Acer plans to hold the HPAT exam moving forward, I think that it is important that you are prepared to sit it online. Should this be the case, I'd recommend...

- Making sure that you have **a suitable device** to take the test on, preferably one you are used to working on.
- Having **speedy wifi**.
- Finding **a quiet area** to take the test in without distractions and disruptions. Preferably, an area with a bathroom nearby as every minute is precious in the exam.

A Few General Tips Before You Start

- **Devise an effective study plan.** As with any exam it is very important that you have a clear goal in mind of what score you want to obtain in the HPAT. Once you have established this, work backwards, and decide how many hours a week you can afford to and are willing to spend on your preparation. For me this was doing a drill or two every day, but others prefer to do longer bursts with a few days in between. Use the first few weeks of your preparation to establish what works best for you, then set a plan in place and stick to it!
- **Study in intense bursts.** The HPAT is highly taxing on the mind and requires a very deep level of concentration. Ensure that every single session has a purpose, and you are fully invested in the task in hand. It is so easy to fall into the trap of completing as many drills as possible just for the sake of it, but I would say avoid doing this as much as possible. As they say, "Quality over Quantity."
- **Practice tests** are what I would consider to be the most important components of your HPAT preparation. Not only will they enhance your skill and familiarity with questions, but you will also develop stamina and concentration. MedEntry offers 10 practice tests with the option to purchase 5 more should you run out, but I would say that 10 is more than enough. Spread these out evenly perhaps doing one every 2 to 3 weeks. One thing not to underestimate the value of is reviewing the tests and redoing the questions you got wrong. I often spent more time redoing questions on the test, and reviewing the answers, than I did on the exam itself and this is certainly the most effective way to improve. We learn from our mistakes and the wonderful thing about MedEntry is that it allows you to attempt incorrectly answered questions up to 4 times, there is no way you will make the same mistake again when you spend that much time reviewing a question!

Section Breakdown: Logical Reasoning and Problem Solving

READ - REMEMBER - UNDERSTAND - ANALYSE – EVALUATE

In this section candidates are once again presented with a passage on which they answer questions based on how particular characters are feeling and their behaviours.

Much of the skills we need in this section can be developed and improved as we go about our daily lives. Learn about others' emotions in the day to day by observing their facial expression, tone of voice and body posture - these are essentially the things which you will be observing in HPAT stimuli, and which will help you come to the right answer. Anticipate how your own words and actions will affect the feelings of others and their potential reactions and then see how it plays out in real life.

- **For this section do not look at the questions before reading the stimulus**, this can sway how you view characters and their actions in a way that does not benefit you and will not always lead you to the right answer.
- **Identify key issues, key conflicts, character thoughts, feelings and motives.** Notice if they change and ask yourself why. These are the aspects which are likely to form the basis of a question.
- **Shape your mood** - be positive, optimistic and empathetic when reading the stimulus, consciously smile as you read! Believe it or not this will affect how you approach and answer questions.
- **Think emotionally not logically** and read with emphasis on the feelings and emotions of people involved.
- **Be mature and non-judgemental**, there is always a reason behind a person's behaviour so try to appreciate and understand where the characters are coming from.

- **Understand the cultural norms**, especially for cartoon questions. Think about what the majority would say.
- **Understand relationships between different emotional words**. For example, the opposite of anger is fear. Small differences in a definition can make a huge difference when it comes to answering the questions in this section.
- **Underline emotional words** and moments of conflict, this will help to increase speed.
- **Improve your emotional vocabulary** - make a list! Every time you come across a new adjective, jot it down and more than that, attempt to use it in everyday life as this will ensure you have a deep and thorough understanding of the word.
- **Engage with the piece of writing**, place yourself in the characters shoes, make facial expressions to match the characters feelings, perhaps even try match their tone of voice!! All of this will help you to really understand how a character is feeling.
- **Predict the answer first**, then look at the options. Trust your intuition.
- Remember: **Evidence must be "Rooted in the text."**

Section Breakdown: Non-Verbal Reasoning

COMPONENT - POSITIONING - LATERAL REASONING

There are many different types of questions in this section, and it is important to become familiar with each. These include complete the sequence, pick the middle and missing segment questions but more recently they have thrown in a few new ideas such as matrix questions. In this way it is important that you expect the unexpected and learn not to be thrown by unfamiliar question stems. If something is new, you are not the only one that is likely to be slightly taken aback or confused by it, do not waste too much time on these types of questions, use your gut and move on.

- **Look out for rules**, such as: What are the components of the pattern? How do the components engage? Is it consistent each time or is it progressive? This can be in relation to shape, size, orientation (flipped/rotated), position in figure (up/down/sideways etc.) or colour etc.
- Usually, **the simplest explanation is the right answer** so do not overcomplicate things.
- **There are many strategies** for this section including mapping, the 4-2 method and the 3-2 method which are covered extensively and with great examples in the MedEntry package which I found very useful. They can take a while to get used to but once you start seeing them everything becomes a whole lot easier with much less work!
- One thing I would say about this section is that **it is very easy to improve in**. The more practice you can do the better as practice really does make perfect here.

Final Tips For The Night Before The Exam

- **Skip questions with a long stimulus** and come back to them, do not waste time reading through an entire stimulus at the beginning only for the nerves to take over and for you to realise absolutely nothing is going in.
- **Make an educated guess and move on.** Guess an answer which is somewhat similar to other options and deals with the main issue of the question.
- **Avoid answer options which contain absolutes.**
- **Identify the main issue of the question** and eliminate irrelevant options that go outside of the scope of the question.
- **Predict the answer** before reading the answer options in section 2.
- Don't think too much and do not second guess yourself! **Follow your gut!**
- **MOVE ON!!** Time management is so important for HPAT so check your pace periodically. Have an idea of where you should be at certain intervals without becoming distracted by or fixated on the time. Do not spend more than 2 minutes on any given question.

Test Day

The Most important thing at this point is to be in your top physical, mental, emotional and psychological condition.

- **Eat a good breakfast** to fuel you through the exam.
- Do your best to have a good night's **sleep**, this will ensure you can remain focussed throughout.
- **Adopt a positive mental attitude**, you have done everything you can and worked incredibly hard to this point. Give yourself credit for this and believe that you can achieve.
- **Stay Calm**

Concentration is paramount - ensure that you are in a comfortable environment where you can become oblivious to your surroundings and concentrate solely on the task in hand.

Remember...

Do not worry. The HPAT is only an entrance exam and ultimately there are so many routes to Medicine if it does not work out.

I wish you all the best with your preparation, and perhaps I will meet some of you studying Medicine in UCC in the coming years.



Good luck in the HPAT!
You will be great!