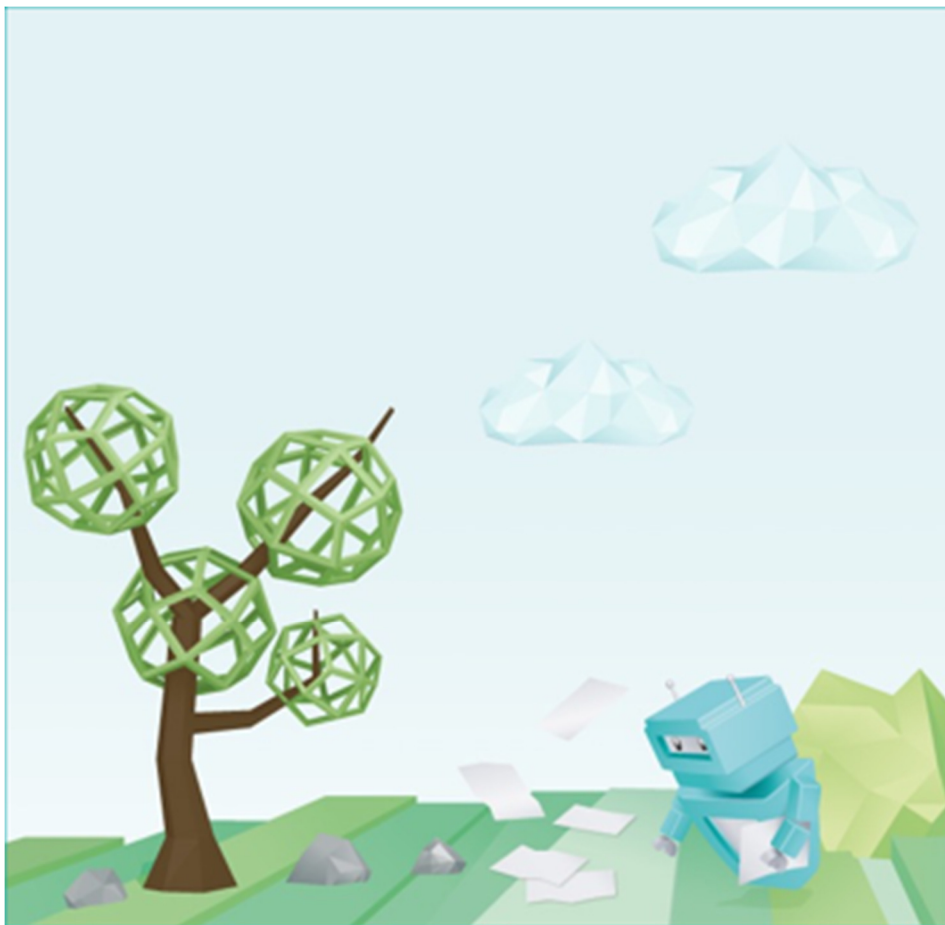


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HPAT

How to succeed in the HPAT Exam



by **Aditi C.**

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She got 193 points in the HPAT this February, securing the 97th percentile nationwide.

The Health Professionals Admissions Test, more commonly known as the HPAT, is an exam you have to take in addition to the Leaving Cert, in order to obtain a place in Undergraduate Medicine in Ireland. It usually takes place near the end of February in 6th year.

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Exam Layout & Grading

There are 3 sections in this exam, each testing different sets of skills;

1. **Logical Reasoning & Problem Solving** (44 questions, 65 minutes)
 2. **Interpersonal Understanding** (36 questions, 45 minutes)
 3. **Non-Verbal Reasoning** (30 questions, 40 minutes)
- The grading of the HPAT is very different to exams you may have sat before, it operates on a **percentile** system.
 - After the HPAT has been corrected, the student who has received the highest score will be allocated the 100th percentile, meaning that she/he has done better than 100% of the other candidates. Similarly, the student who has obtained the 74th percentile has performed better than 74% of the HPAT cohort. When you receive your results, your percentile will give a pretty good indication of the chance you have of getting in.
 - Your HPAT results are only **valid for one year**. If you decide to repeat the Leaving Cert, you have no other choice but to repeat the HPAT too.

Exam Preparation

I prepared for the HPAT using a website called **Medentry**. They have a massive bank of questions and mock exams that you can complete online. They are a bit pricey, something that you should keep in mind. If you find two other people who will buy the package with you, you will be eligible for a group discount, and who doesn't like to save a bit of money!



Where to Start?

- I bought *Medentry* during September, so it wasn't like I had been preparing from the start of fifth year or anything! Believe it or not, I didn't start practising questions until the start of December! I used to do short but very intensive bursts of HPAT study. I seriously started focussing on the HPAT during the Christmas holidays. I tried my best to cover as many notes as I could during those two weeks and did a few 'drills' here and there.
- As the weeks went by, my short bursts of intensive study became longer and more targeted. I figured out which section was my weakest and which questions I didn't perform up to standard in. Working this out really helps when you are stuck for time and need to decide which questions to guess the answers for.
- It is important to get into the **mindset of sitting the exam** from your very first day of preparation. I spaced out my trial exams to sync with the timing of the HPAT. I had ten trial exams, so I started on them 10 weeks before the test in February. I made sure to do them on a Saturday morning, just as it would be on the day.

Section 1

- Before I jump into preparation techniques, it is very important to remember that it is extremely unlikely that you will get to finish this section in the time allocated. **Don't be disheartened**, everyone is in the same boat! For the questions that you're not able to attempt, **guess and move on**.
- This section is all about **quick thinking**. There will be large amounts of material to read through and answer questions on. Additionally, there are mathematical and statistical aspects to this section.
- I cannot emphasise how important it is to **read the questions before you begin to read the text**. This will not only help you filter unimportant information, but will keep you focused.
- **Practise scanning and retaining information** between now and the exam. Recent years have seen the questions lean towards problem solving and being able to understand large amounts of data. Hence, **you should be practising with newspaper articles or academic writing**.
- **Underline figures or words** that you believe are relevant to the questions being asked. Be careful not to lip read the sentences, this will only cost you time, remember you won't have the luxury of being able to read the text twice, therefore you must try and retain as much information as you can in the first go and by using as little time as possible.
- **Fine tune your mental maths** before the exam, it will go a really long way. Remember, you are not allowed to bring calculators into the exam centre. Doing calculations in your head will save you precious seconds!
- As this is the first section, expect to be jittery. The first question will probably take you very long (as it did with me!), do not let that throw you!



Section 2

- Apart from practising questions, the best thing to do would be to make a list of **vocabulary** you come across, between now and the exam, that you don't understand. Specificity is key in the HPAT, for example, do you know the difference between envy and jealousy? These words may seem the same to you, but knowing the small difference between them is essential, not knowing could cost you your first preference!
- Otherwise, try to read the passages with a tone of **positivity**. Put yourself in the characters' shoes. In my opinion, whenever you are stuck between two options, pick the happier one, it usually works in your favour!

Section 3

- This section, more than any other, is all about **practise, practise, practise!** You need to develop a sense of pattern recognition. This is the most difficult section for many, including myself.
- Over time, however, you learn that the process of finding the right answer becomes very **mechanical**. All you need to do is find one symbol or picture that connects the pattern and you will be flying!



Days Leading up to the HPAT

The days leading up to the HPAT can be particularly stressful as many students have to balance their mocks with HPAT prep. I did not do the mocks. I decided in January that I had to prioritise one thing over the other and I chose the HPAT. I understand that this may not be suited to every student, but I would strongly advise **not to burn yourself out**. The mocks are only trial runs, the HPAT, however, is real.

Doomsday

- Nearly every blog on the HPAT will tell you to get a **good night's sleep** before the big day. The situation was very different for me. Nervousness got to me and I only had 2 hours sleep that night! Definitely do not do what I did! Calm yourself down before you sleep, read a book, go on a walk, etc.
- Wear **comfortable clothes**. I wore tracksuit bottoms and a loose t-shirt with a hoodie. Some centres can get very cold, so be sure to wear layers.
- This is obvious, but be sure to have a **good breakfast** the morning of the HPAT. Something that's not too heavy and not too light, just the right balance. Snack on an energy bar right before the exam, it will boost your focus and keep you on your toes.
- Leave your house **early**. Traffic near the exam centres are very unpredictable and you could be stuck for longer than expected.
- Go to the **toilet before the exam**. Many people take a toilet break in section 2 as they feel they have plenty of time. Try not to do this!
- Bring a few **pencils**, a **good eraser**, a **sharpener** and a **bottle of water** to the exam, they will come in handy, I promise!



How to Know If You Should Do Medicine

The thing about Medicine is that it's a career that **caters for everyone**. There are so many career paths you can take with a medical degree! You can become a GP, a surgeon, a researcher, a physician, an army doctor, the possibilities are endless! The only thing is, you have to make this decision **on your own**, don't succumb to any pressure from family or indeed, from any friends. If you are unsure about anything, it would be best to talk to a guidance counsellor or an adult you trust.

Final Tips

- I would highly recommend getting **answer sheets** to fill out the answers on, I can't emphasise how much it helps, especially if what you're practising from is online.
- I really want to warn against giving yourself more **time** than is allocated for each section in your mock exams. This will only lull you into a false sense of security and may cause a lot of panic on the day, something you should be aiming to minimise!
- Mastering the HPAT is all about learning **specific skills** and **time management**. The biggest piece of advice I can give you is to **trust your own instinct** and do what you feel is right for your preparation. Ignore the people on the online forums who boast about the huge amount of work they've gotten done, they are usually lying!
- The answers to the questions will be lying right in front of you. Use the **process of elimination** ruthlessly throughout the exam, it will make the entire process much less daunting.
- At the end of the day, it is just another exam. Your life does not depend on the HPAT. If you don't do as well as you expected, there are plenty of other doors that will open for you, don't be afraid to **explore your options**.





I want to wish you all the very best of luck with both the HPAT and the Leaving Cert. Just put your head down, work hard and there is no way you won't succeed :)

