

Medentia Free Resource

UCAT Survival Guide — What to Focus On, How to Time It, and How to Actually Improve

Compiled by the Medentia team | 98% offer rate across tutored students, 2026 cycle

Most people approach UCAT revision the wrong way. They buy a question bank, grind through hundreds of questions, and then wonder why their score isn't moving. This guide is about working smarter — understanding what each section is actually testing, where your time goes, and what actually makes a difference to your score.

What UCAT Actually Is

UCAT is not a knowledge test. There is nothing to memorise. It is a test of how quickly and accurately you can process information, make decisions, and apply logic under time pressure. That distinction matters because it completely changes how you should prepare for it.

You cannot cram for UCAT the way you cram for a biology exam. What you can do is get faster, sharper, and more consistent through deliberate, structured practice — understanding why you're getting questions wrong, not just that you got them wrong.

UCAT currently has four sections: Verbal Reasoning, Decision Making, Quantitative Reasoning, and Situational Judgement. The total scored sections are marked out of 2700 (900 per scored section across VR, DM and QR), with SJT reported separately as a band from 1 to 4.

Give yourself 6-12 weeks minimum to prepare. UCAT is a skill and skills take time to build — students who treat it as an afterthought consistently underperform relative to their actual ability.

The Four Sections — What They Test and What to Focus On

1. Verbal Reasoning

Time allowed: 21 minutes | **Questions:** 44 | **Time per question:** roughly 28 seconds

What it's testing: Your ability to quickly read, understand, and critically evaluate written information. There are two main question types — True/False/Can't Tell, and Best Answer questions.

The most important word in Verbal Reasoning is "only." Your answer must be based solely on what the passage says. It doesn't matter if you know for a fact that something is true in real life — if the passage doesn't say it, the answer is either False or Can't Tell.

What to focus on:

Read the question before you read the passage. Know what you're hunting for before you start reading — otherwise you're reading everything and retaining nothing useful. For True/False/Can't Tell questions, Can't Tell is correct more often than people expect. If the passage neither confirms nor clearly contradicts the statement, Can't Tell is the answer — don't talk yourself into True or False because it feels more decisive. For longer passages, scan for keywords from the question rather than reading every line. Numbers, dates and specific terms are the fastest things to find.

This is the most mentally challenging section for most people. Don't let a hard passage rattle you — flag it and move on.

The biggest time trap: Reading the passage in full before looking at the questions. You will run out of time every single time if you do this.

2. Decision Making

Time allowed: 37 minutes | **Questions:** 35 | **Time per question:** roughly 63 seconds

What it's testing: Your ability to evaluate information, interpret data, and apply logic to make sound decisions. This section has the most variety of question types — logical puzzles, syllogisms, data interpretation, probability, Venn diagrams, and Yes/No argument evaluation.

The key rule across all of them: do not jump to conclusions. Every question type rewards careful, systematic thinking over gut instinct.

What to focus on:

For syllogisms, draw a quick two-circle Venn diagram rather than trying to reason through it in your head — it takes five seconds and eliminates most errors. You could also experiment with the flow chart method, whatever works for you. For probability questions, convert percentages to simple fractions before calculating — it's faster and less error-prone. For "which conclusion follows" questions, be ruthless about the difference between "could be true" and "must be true" — if a conclusion could be false in any scenario, it doesn't follow. For Venn diagram questions, work out the relationships between groups step by step before answering.

The biggest time trap: Spending too long on a single question. Decision Making gives you more time per question than other sections — but that extra time disappears fast if you get stuck. Flag and move on.

3. Quantitative Reasoning

Time allowed: 25 minutes | **Questions:** 36 | **Time per question:** roughly 42 seconds

What it's testing: Your ability to extract data from tables, graphs and charts and perform calculations accurately and quickly. The maths itself is not hard — GCSE level at most. The challenge is speed and accuracy under pressure. Work on your calculator skills — the onscreen calculator is your best friend in this section and being slow with it costs marks.

What to focus on:

Look at the answer options before you calculate. Often you can estimate and match without doing precise arithmetic — if the options are far apart, a rough calculation is enough to eliminate three of them. Learn to multiply and divide by 10, 100 and 1000 instantly without thinking. A huge number of QR questions involve percentage changes, unit conversions or scaling — all of which come down to this. For percentage change, always use the formula (new minus old) divided by old. Use the onscreen calculator for anything that isn't near-instant mental arithmetic — don't burn time trying to do complex sums in your head to seem efficient.

The biggest time trap: Getting drawn into complex calculations when estimation would have gotten you the right answer in a quarter of the time.

4. Situational Judgement

Time allowed: 26 minutes | **Questions:** 69 | **Reported as:** Band 1–4 (not included in the 2700 total)

What it's testing: Your understanding of GMC guidelines, professionalism and ethics — how you respond to realistic scenarios involving dilemmas, team dynamics and professional behaviour in a medical context. This section uses partial marking, which means small differences between your answer and the correct one still cost you marks. Don't guess —

make sure you have a clear understanding of the underlying principles before you sit the test.

What to focus on:

The framework for every question is the same: patient safety comes first, always. After that — honesty, professional responsibility, escalating appropriately, and maintaining dignity and respect. "Appropriate" means it genuinely helps the situation without breaking professional or ethical boundaries. "Very inappropriate" means it actively risks patient safety, involves dishonesty, or is clearly unprofessional. Practice consistently using an official question bank and go over every mistake carefully — make sure you understand exactly where you went wrong and why, not just that you got it wrong. SJT rewards genuine understanding of GMC values, not pattern matching.

The biggest time trap: Overthinking scenarios that seem more complex than they are. Most SJT questions have a fairly clear right answer once you apply the framework consistently.

Timing Strategy — The Non-Negotiable Rules

Flag and move on. This is the single most important habit in UCAT. Every second you spend stuck on a question you're going to guess anyway is a second stolen from a question you could have gotten right. Flag it, move on, come back at the end if you have time.

Never leave a question blank. There is no negative marking in UCAT for VR, DM and QR. A guess is always better than nothing — you have a one in four chance on a blind guess, and often better once you've eliminated options.

Do a timed practice mock at the exact time of day you'll sit the real test. If your test is at 9am, practice at 9am. Cognitive performance varies significantly across the day and you want your brain used to performing at that specific time.

Track your performance by section, not overall. Medical schools look at individual section scores, not just the total out of 2700. A very high score in two sections and a very low score in one is not the same as a balanced score — know where your weakest section is and attack it.

What Actually Moves Your Score

Understanding why you got something wrong — every single time. Not just marking it incorrect and moving on. What was the rule you missed? What did you misread? What would you do differently? This review process is where the actual improvement happens, not in the volume of questions you complete.

Consistency over cramming. Thirty minutes of focused UCAT practice every day for six to twelve weeks will outperform six hours the week before the test almost every time. Your brain needs repeated exposure to these question types to build the pattern recognition and processing speed the test rewards.

Simulating real test conditions regularly. Sitting in a quiet room, timed, no phone, no breaks between sections. The real test is psychologically demanding in a way that casual practice doesn't replicate — the earlier you start practicing under real conditions, the less the environment will affect you on the day.

Want personalised support with your UCAT prep? We offer a free 15-minute taster session so you can see exactly how we work before committing to anything. Head to [medentia.co.uk](https://www.medentia.co.uk) to book yours — no payment needed.