

Simplify the Question Stem: Informing Future Doctors MCAT Program

Link to test taking strategy video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3Yjjccxeec&t=111s>

Simplifying the question stem isn't so simple. It's a difficult skill that requires intentional trial-and-error. The goal is to take the tough wordy questions of the MCAT and restate them in a manner that removes the fluff and highlights the basic science or relationship that's truly being tested. Are you starting to notice a trend here? The MCAT includes tons of information in the passage and the question stem that you do not need to know. If you do not know the answer to a question, it's probably because you missed a passage clue or you have misunderstood the question being asked.

Beginning now, you will attempt to simplify every question you read. We will emphasize this in strategy session. Admittedly, this is easier for some questions than it is others. However, it is possible for all questions.

A good simple place to start is by asking yourself, "What is this question *really* asking me"?

Steps to Simplifying the Question Stem:

1. Identify whether the question is testing your basic science knowledge or your ability to interpret the passage and its figures.
2. Identify the specific science or relationship
3. Literally rewrite the question in your mind removing the fluff and highlighting the tested concept you've just identified.

Drills to Improve your Simplification of the Question Stem:

1. With your Accountability Group: Pick 5 questions to take in an untimed condition. Have your accountability group agree to take the same 5 questions. Complete the steps listed above and write down your answer to each step. Compare steps and see who had the best simplification of the question. Discuss your thought processes as you rephrased it and see if you can help each other avoid common pitfalls. Keep track of which step you are usually messing up and focus your effort there. Slowly add time constraints as you and your group become more comfortable.
2. By yourself: Pick questions that you have previously taken in strategy sessions or on an FLE. Without looking at the correct answer, try to simplify each question with a 30-second timer set. Make sure you walk through each step and arrive at a coherent and simplified question.

