Biomedical Science students should plan to complete their first attempt at the MCAT early. If the first attempt at the MCAT doesn’t go well, then there is time to retake the exam. Consider the following questions when deciding if you want to retake the MCAT.

**Assessing Your Preparation**
- How have you tended to perform on standardized tests?
- How well did you prepare? Did you thoroughly review and take practice tests?
- How did you score on practice tests? How did you score on the practice test compared to the actual test?

**Assessing the First Attempt**
- How did you feel the actual test went for you? Were you sick? Were you overly anxious? Did you run out of time before answering all the questions?
- Do you feel your scores accurately represent your ability?
- What was your overall performance? Dental schools usually use the academic average, but differ in how they use the perceptual ability score. Optometry schools usually use the academic average. And, medical schools usually use the total of the verbal, physical and biological science sections.
- Are there individual scores which might be seen as significant weaknesses? Whether or not a score is seen as weakness depends on the evaluator and the context (grades in related courses, English as a 2nd language, etc.).

**Other Factors**
- How competitive are the other aspects of your candidacy? Grades, activities, or recommendations.
- Are there other important contexts for interpreting your scores? Are you disadvantaged, learning disabled, a first-generation college student, or a member of an underrepresented minority with lower average scores? Was English your second language?
- Where would you like to go to school? Admissions guides usually list average test scores for accepted candidates. Schools also have different policies for how they will use the scores from multiple tests.
- What happened to other people who re-took the test with similar initial scores? In general, those who scored lower than average tend to improve, while those who scored higher than average often score lower on a re-take. Hint for medical school applicants, there is some helpful data at [www.aamc.org/students/mcat/examineedata/tables.htm](http://www.aamc.org/students/mcat/examineedata/tables.htm).

**Retaking the Exam**
- How thoroughly would you prepare for a retake? Because most students are out of an academic mode in the summer, it is especially important to thoroughly prepare for an end-of-summer test.
- What opportunities would you miss out on by re-taking the test? Would your time, effort and money be better spent strengthening other aspects of your candidacy, or do you really need an improved score to be competitive?
- Do you want to retake the test? Are you energized enough to do the preparation and practice necessary to improve your scores? And, if you do decide to take the test again, don’t fall into the trap of studying just for the test you already took. It’s important to re-review for all the topics that could be sampled!
- In general, if you scored lower than average for admission, you have indications you can do significantly better, and you are motivated to thoroughly review and practice, then signs point to re-taking.

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With permission from Paul Crosby, University of Kansas
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