

Waiting in the wings

THE CAT FEVER HAS BEGUN. SLATED FOR NOVEMBER, THE CAT IS NOW ON THE MIND OF EVERY MBA ASPIRANT. ARUN SHARMA EXPLAINS HOW THE RIGHT APPROACH AND ATTITUDE TO THE EXAM CAN MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE

The month of June commences an uphill battle for a majority of the over two and a half lakh CAT aspirants, as they start their meticulous preparations for the fiercely competitive exam. With over five months left for the CAT, you have the potential to ensure you make a major difference to your chances of cracking the CAT this November. All you need are the right preparation strategies.

Well, you needn't worry about that anymore. Today's article focuses on helping you create an outline for your CAT.

ISSUE NO 1: DO NOT GET INTIMIDATED BY THE CAT

Many CAT aspirants get intimidated by the exam and the competition they have to face. The result is that they never really believe they can crack it and it is one of the biggest reasons for failure in the CAT. The difference between a 70 percentile and a 99 percentile score is never more than six to eight questions. Hence, any student who has ever scored 70 percentile in the CAT could have reached a percentile of 97 to 99 by just approaching six to eight questions differently.

Ask these students three crucial questions, and they will realise how much better they could have scored.

These questions are:

- a) How many silly errors did you make in the exam? Let the number of such errors be 'A'.
- b) How many questions did you read in the exam for which you remembered the answers only after you left the hall? Let the number of such questions be 'B'
- c) How many questions did you not read in the exam, but knew the answer when you saw them after the paper? Let the number of such questions be 'C'.

Here, your score could have improved substantially, ie, by calculating $A \times 4 + B \times 4 + C \times 4$. Note: This could have happened on the basis of your current knowledge. We have not even started to discuss knowledge increment here.

It is common knowledge that the minimum value of $A+B+C$ for students whose scores ranged between 70 to 90 percentile, would be in the range of 12 to 15 (in a 75 question paper). You could have had a minimum score improvement of 50+ marks — something that would have ensured a jump of 20 to 30 percentile.

Consider the evidence: In the latest CAT, there were approximately 75,000 students who scored 70 percentile, while only some 2000 odd students scored 99 percentile. This means that the other 73,000 students lost out just because of a few questions.

According to calculations, in the CAT 2007 paper, anyone who managed to score 80 percentile, merely had to avoid six errors to get the coveted call. Some 50,000 students scored over 80 percentile in CAT 2007, and had an opportunity to score better. In fact, any student who scored 90+ percentile would be just three questions away from an IIM call!

The fact of the matter is that 25,000 students scored 90 percentile in the latest CAT. If you were to ask them about how far he/she was from acing the CAT, most of them would be under the impression that they would need at least one to two years of preparation. Worse, most students with a percentile of 70 to 80 would not even believe that they have the requisite intelligence to pass the CAT. **ISSUE NO 2: PREPARE ON A WIDE ANGLED FRAMEWORK**

The CAT is full of surprises. This image has been created over 15 to 20 years of constantly changing patterns and question types.

This image has emerged because students tend to work and prepare in a set way. They use the papers from the past two to three years as a reference, thinking it is representative of what the CAT is today, and base their preparations on it. This is one of the most common follies that CAT aspirants make. Ideally, an aspirant for CAT 2008 will discount what happened in CAT 2000 (for instance) knowing that the year 2000 was almost a decade ago and what happened in CAT then is most unlikely to happen again.

Aspirants in CAT 2006 had to regret this line of thinking. 'Facts, Inferences and Judgements', a question type neglected by CAT aspirants and training institutes across India, made an appearance after a gap of - hold your breath - 14 years. Yes, the last time it had been seen in the CAT was in 1992. There have been numerous such cases and examples, but to get to the point - if you prepare for the CAT with a two to three year perspective, you would always be surprised.

Our advice: 1) Prepare for a 10 to 15 year perspective and the surprise element of the CAT will no longer exist.

2) Do not try to guess the number of questions, the types of questions, even the number of sections. Instead be prepared for any change in pattern, and during your preparations, focus on the development of your intelligence to crack the CAT.

ISSUE NO 3: OBJECTIVE SETTING FOR YOUR PREPARATIONS

Cut offs for IIM calls have been in the range of 100 to 110 out of 300 over the past two years.

Aspirants make the error of aiming for a score of 110 marks only. If you prepare for 110 and slip up by just five questions, your score would dip to 75 to 80 percentile.

Instead, if you prepare for 150 to 160 marks (50+ in each section), even if you were to make about five to six errors, your score would just drop from 99.5 percentile+ to 99 percentile+.

As we will demonstrate in future articles in this series, scoring 50+ marks in any particular section of the CAT can be easily accomplished! So Keep watching this space.

The CAT comes Calling

THE MONTH OF JULY SIGNIFIES AN INCREASE IN THE INTENSITY OF PREPARATION FOR THE CAT EXAM. ARUN SHARMA TAKES YOU THROUGH THE LAST FOUR-MONTH PHASE OF PREPARATION FOR THE EXAM

**How many questions do you plan to do in each area of Quants before you go for the CAT?
How many passages on reading comprehension do you intend to solve before you take the CAT?
How many questions on areas like reasoning, data interpretation etc do you intend to solve prior to taking the CAT?**

An oft repeated query of CAT aspirants is: "How much time do I need to prepare for the CAT?" A suitable analogy to this query would be the question: "How much time would it take to reach New Delhi railway station?"

The answer is dependant on three things:

- a) What is your starting point?
- b) At what speed would you be travelling?
and most importantly
- c) Would you be taking the straight line approach to the destination or would you be taking a circuitous route?

Experience and past records show that unlike university exams, where there is more clarity about minimum and maximum preparation time, the CAT is an exam which subscribes to neither. One sees students clear the CAT in as less as three to four weeks and then there are students at the other end of the spectrum, who do not clear it even after three or four years.

ISSUE 1: When planning your preparation, be task-oriented and not time-oriented

In simpler terms, focus on defining the quantum of work rather than defining the time schedules for the work. Your focus should be on what work you need to do, rather than focusing on the time dimension of your preparation.

So instead of trying to explore questions like: "How much time should I devote to which subject on a daily basis?," think of how much work you would need to do on a particular subject in order to shift your ability level from your starting level to the desired level.

For instance, if your current ability in the subject of quantitative aptitude is in the below 50 percentile level and you aspire to move your percentile to the range of 95 percentile plus — you would broadly need to do anywhere between 4000 to 6000 questions during your preparations. (Depending on how much you can learn from every question).

Thus, how much time it would take on a per day basis then is immaterial. All that matters is whether you have completed your work or not.

Similarly, you should try to define the outline of work based on the following parameters:

- How many questions do you plan to do in each area of Quants before you go for the CAT?
- How many passages on reading comprehension do you intend to solve before you take the CAT?
- How many questions on areas like reasoning, data interpretation etc do you intend to solve prior to taking the CAT?
- How many tests do you intend to solve prior to taking the CAT?

Once you have drawn outlines for each area, you can easily work out how much work you need to finish by the end of the current week.

ISSUE 2: Do not try to balance your preparations on a daily basis, but balance your work on a weekly basis

Attempts to balance work in areas such as English, verbal ability, reading comprehension, quants and data interpretation and reasoning on a daily basis, would only lead to frustration. Instead, you need to ensure that you maintain equal emphasis on each area of preparation on a weekly basis. In other words, on a weekly basis you could plan days on which you are only doing Quants and other days where you might only be doing reading comprehension.

ISSUE 3: Learn to enjoy your work and do not look at it as a burden

Aristotle had once remarked: "Find a job you love and you will never have to work a single day of your life."

Preparations for aptitude exams especially the CAT, if taken up through the right intelligence development approach, could turn out to be the most entertaining study process you have ever gone through. In fact, the enjoyment of the preparation process is one of the common features observed among successful students.

So, take a reality check on how much you are enjoying quants, data interpretation, language and vocabulary preparation. In case you have started to look at any of this as a burden, there is something seriously wrong in the way you are approaching the exam. Try to change the way you perceive the work you are trying to do. CAT preparation, and all its components, is extremely enjoyable if you approach it in conjunction to improving your thought process, basic intelligences and your exposure.

ISSUE 4: A paradox: Make CAT the most important thing in your life at the same time reduce the importance of CAT in your life

Paradoxical as the above statement may seem, there is a perfectly logical explanation. While you are preparing for the exam, you would be required to make sacrifices and adjustments to your life in such a way that you will have to be mentally prepared to leave everything else in the process of CAT preparation. Thus, while preparing you should be working as if there is nothing more crucial in your life than the CAT.

At the same time, by design, you should try to reduce how important the result of the CAT is for your life. Hence, you should have a back up plan for a situation wherein you would be failing in the CAT. Having this plan ready ironically would help you take the pressure of performance off your shoulders resulting in your best chance of belling the CAT.

BELLING THE CAT

APPROPRIATE PREPARATION AND APPLICATION OF THE RIGHT THOUGHT PROCESS CAN HELP YOU CLEAR THE CAT EXAM WITHOUT MUCH DIFFICULTY. ARUN SHARMA PRESENTS THE QA SECTION OF THE CAT 2007 EXAM WITH TIPS ON HOW TO APPROACH EACH QUESTION

One of the things that has amazed experts and academicians about the CAT for a long time now, is that the exam continues to retain its aura of invincibility. This, in spite of the fact that most questions, which appear in the exam, are elementary class ten questions. Presented below is the quantitative aptitude (QA) section of the CAT 2007 paper along with the methodical approach that should be adopted to get the right answers.

1) How many pairs of positive integers m, n satisfy $1/m + 4/n = 1/12$ where n is an odd integer less than 60?

- (a) 7 (b) 5 (c) 3
(d) 6 (e) 4**

Thought process:

Deduction 1: Since two positive fractions on the LHS equals $1/12$ on the right hand side, the value of both these fractions must be less than $1/12$. Hence, n can only take the values 49, 51, 53, 55, 57 and 59.

Deduction 2: After this, students need to check which of the possible values of n would give an integral value of m .

The equation can be transformed to $1/12 - 4/n = 1/m \Rightarrow (n - 48)/12n = 1/m$. On reading this equation one should realise that for m to be an integer, the LHS must be able to yield a ratio in the form of $1/x$. It can be easily seen that this occurs for $n = 49$, $n = 51$ and $n = 57$. Hence, there are only three pairs.

Maximum solution time: 90 seconds

2) Suppose you have a currency, named Miso, in three denominations: 1 Miso, 10 Misos and 50 Misos. In how many ways can you pay a bill of 107 Misos? (a) 18 (b) 15 (c) 19 (d) 17 (e) 16

Thought process: Deduction 1: If you were to use two 50 miso notes, you would only pay the remaining 7 misos through one miso notes. **Deduction 2:** If you were to use only one 50 miso note, you could use 10 miso notes in 6 different ways (from zero to five). **Deduction 3:** If you were not to use any 50 miso notes, you could use 10 miso notes in 11 different ways (from zero to 10). Hence, the required answer is $1 + 6 + 11 = 18$.

Maximum solution time: 45 seconds

3) In a tournament, there are n teams T_1, T_2, \dots, T_n , with $n > 5$. Each team consists of k players, $k > 3$. The following pairs of teams have one player in common: T_1 and T_2 , T_2 and T_3 , ..., T_{n-1} and T_n , and T_n and T_1 . No other pair of teams has any player in common. How many players are participating in the tournament, considering all the n teams are together? (a) $n(k - 2)$ (b) $k(n - 2)$ (c) $(n - 1)(k - 1)$ (d) $n(k - 1)$ (e) $k(n - 1)$

Thought process: If one considers six teams and four players per team, one would get four players in T_1 (each one of them unique), three more players in T_2 (since one player of T_2 would be shared with T_1), three more players in T_3 (since one player of T_3 would be shared with T_2), three more players in T_4 (since one player of T_4 would be shared with T_3), three more players in T_5 (since one player of T_5 would be shared with T_4) and two more players in T_6 (since one player of T_6 would be shared with T_5 and one with T_1). Hence, there would be a total of $18 (4 + 3 + 3 + 3 + 3 + 2)$ players with $n = 6$ and $k = 4$. Only option four would provide 18 as the solution.

Maximum solution time: 60 seconds.

4) Consider four digit numbers for which the first two digits are equal and the last two digits are also equal. How many such numbers are perfect squares?

- (a) 4 (b) 0 (c) 1
(d) 3 (e) 2

Thought process:

A number of students got stuck on this question for over five to seven minutes in the exam, since they tried to find out the squares of all two-digit numbers starting from 32. However, if one is well of the logic of finding squares of two digit numbers, one would realise that only three two-digit numbers after 32 have the last two digits in their squares equal (38, 62 and 88). Hence, there is no need to check any other numbers apart from these three. After checking these one would get the square of 88 as 7744. And hence, there is only one such number.

Maximum solution time: 60 seconds About the QA section of CAT 2007

- a) Test takers who were able to attempt seven to eight questions out of the 25 questions in the paper received an excess of 95 percentile (for this section). Students were given 50 minutes to complete each section in the exam
- b) At zero marks in this paper, students reported a 20 percentile score. This in effect means that one in five test takers scored negative marks.

CAT comes calling

THE CAT MAY BE CHALLENGING BUT IT CAN BE OVERCOME WITH EASE IF ONE HAS A LOGICAL BENT OF MIND AND THE POWER OF RATIONAL THINKING. ARUN SHARMA USES THE QA SECTION OF THE CAT 2007 TO ILLUSTRATE THE PROPER METHOD OF TACKLING THESE QUESTIONS

The basics of the quantitative aptitude (QA) section was touched upon last week. In this article, the focus will lie on how one needs to give solutions and how a clear thought processes can come to your rescue when dealing with problems.

Illustrated below are questions for the quantitative aptitude (QA) section from the CAT 2007.

Remember that these are questions from a CAT paper which is supposed to be the toughest ever.

Before you go ahead with each of the following questions, it is advisable to first take a look at each of the questions given below and try your luck in solving them before you look at the provided solutions.

1. A confused bank teller transposed the rupees and paise when he cashed a cheque for Shailaja, giving her rupees instead of paise and paise instead of rupees. After buying a toffee for 50 paise, Shailaja noticed that she was left with exactly three times as much as the amount on the cheque. Which of the following is a valid statement about the cheque amount? [1] Over Rs 22 but less than Rs 23 [2] Over Rs 18 but less than Rs 19 [3] Over Rs 4 but less than Rs 5 [4] Over Rs 13 but less than Rs 14 [5] Over Rs 7 but less than Rs 8

THOUGHT PROCESS Deduction 1: Question interpretation The solution language for this question requires you to think about what possible amount could be such that when it's rupees and paise value are interchanged, the resultant value is 50 paise more than thrice the original amount.

Deduction 2: Option checking process Armed with this logic, suppose we were to check for option 1, i.e. the value is above Rs 22 but below Rs 23. This essentially means that the amount must be approximately between Rs 22.66 to Rs. 22.69. (We get the paise amount to be between 66 to 69 based on the fact that the relationship between the actual amount, x and the transposed amount y is: $y - 50 \text{ paise} = 3x$. Hence, values below 22.66 and values above 22.70 are not possible.)

From this point onwards we just have to check whether this relationship is satisfied by any of the values between Rs 22.66 to Rs 22.69.

-#Also, realise the fact that in each of these cases the paise value in the value of the transposed amount y would be 22. Thus, $3x$ should give us the paise value as 72. (since we have to subtract 50 paise from the value of 'y' in order to get the value of $3x$).

#This also means that the unit digit of the paise value of $3x$ should be 2.

It can be clearly seen that none of the numbers 66, 67, 68 or 69 when being multiplied by 3 give us a units digit of 2. Hence, this is not a possible answer.

Checking for option 2 in the same fashion

You should realise that the outer limit for the range of values when the amount is between 18 and 19 is: 18.54 to 18.57. Also, the number of paise in the value of the transposed sum 'y' would be 18. Hence, the value of $3x$ should give us a paise value as 68 paise. Again, using the unit's digit principle, it is clear that the only value where the unit's digit would be 8 would be for a value of 18.56. Hence, we check for the check amount to be 18.56. Transposition of the rupee and paise value would give us 56.18. When you subtract 50 paise from this you would get 55.68 which also happen to be thrice 18.56. Hence, the correct answer is Option 2.

Maximum solution time: 2 minutes

2-3: Cities A and B are in different time zones. A is located 3000 km east of B. The schedule of an airline operating non-stop flights between A and B is as follows. (All the times indicated are local

and on the same day). Departure from B 8 AM ; Arrival at A 3 pm; Departure from A 4 PM; Arrival at B 8 pm. Assume that planes cruise at the same speed in both directions. However, the effective speed is influenced by a steady wind blowing from east to west at 50 km per hour.

2. What is the time difference between A and B?

- [1] 2 hours and 30 minutes
- [2] 1 hour
- [3] 1 hour and 30 minutes
- [4] 2 hours
- [5] Cannot be determined

3. What is the plane's cruising speed in km per hour?

- [1] 600 [2] 500
- [3] 700 [4] 550
- [5] Cannot be determined.

Deduction 1: Since the plane flies at 8 AM from city B and lands back at 8 pm the same day, the round trip takes 12 hours out of which 1 hour is spent at city A (where it lands at 3 pm local time and takes off at 4 pm. Hence, total flying time is 11 hours.

Deduction 2: Go into the options for question 3 above. Since the distance is 3000 and the speed of the wind is 50 kmph, option 1, 2 and 3 cannot give you an answer. Why? Simply because for option 1 to work we would need $3000/550 + 3000/650$ to be equal to 11 hours. Leave alone 11, this will not even give us an integral answer; hence we do not need to check this option. Similarly options 2 and 3 will not work as they would not give integral values for the above expression. Checking option 4, we get $3000/500 + 3000/600 = 11$ hours. Hence, the cruising speed of the plane would be 550.

Deduction 3: Since, we are now equipped with the answer to question 3, we can easily go back to question 2 and realise that the plane would take 6 hours to reach City A from city B. Thus, the time difference would be 1 hour.

Maximum solution time: 45 seconds.

CAT CONTROL

ARUN SHARMA REVEALS THE FIRST STEP TO CRACKING THE CAT IS TO LEARN TO RECOGNISE AND OVERTURN YOUR ERRORS

It's July and CAT preparation is at its peak for most 2008 aspirants.

In the last two articles, we focused on questions that appeared in the CAT 2007 quants section and the ways in which we could solve them. It was apparent that simple logical processes would have overcome seemingly very tough processes.

In this article, we focus on a very crucial matter, which if adequately dealt with, can help you improve your test scores.

It is understood that it is extremely important to be dedicatedly taking practice tests at this time. In fact, it is imperative that you realise that the CAT prep is actually divided into two parts. Remember: Each part is as important as the other -

(a) Conceptual development- Through conceptual development, a student can focus on developing a strong theoretical background in each of the three sections of the exam.

(b) Test taking: Any preparation for CAT cannot be complete without a significant number of tests taken by the student. The minimum recommended number would be around 30 to 40 tests. The more, the better.

In fact, while there are a lot of aspirants who are able to crack the CAT and acquire admission to the IIMs or other good management institutes without doing (a), it is extremely rare to come across someone who has cracked the CAT and made it to the IIMs without doing (b). Thus, look at it this way. Ideally, a student's CAT preparation should be about (a) and (b) mixed in a proper fashion, but if you are only doing one, (b) is compulsory, especially if you are good with the basics.

Obviously, a lot of students out there have already started to take tests. It is also very obvious that many of these students will be very concerned about the range in which they might be scoring in these practice tests. The key question students will be facing at this point of time, would be:

“What do I do in order to develop my test scores?”

Also, if you are scoring, say, 50 percentile in your tests now, does it mean that you are on your way to a third-level B-School? Does it mean that the cherished dream that you have always had of getting into the IIMs is going to remain exactly that - a pipe dream?

Absolutely not. Contrary to popular perception, taking a jump from 50 percentile to 99 percentile need not be related to how much you study. You could easily do it with some smart working on your part. So what must you focus on?

A critical issue in CAT preparations is the ability to overturn errors. In the current context of the CAT (last two years), where individual questions have carried four marks for a correct answer, and -1 for an incorrect answer, the net result of an error was five marks. As we have already mentioned in our previous articles in this series, just five errors overturned would give you an additional 25 marks, taking you from 60 percentile to 90 percentile levels.

Refer to the article a few weeks ago, where we had defined your score improvement potential - viz by defining three types of questions:

a) How many silly errors did you make in the exam? Let the number of such silly errors be A.

b) How many questions did you read in the exam for which you remembered the answers only after you left the hall? Let the number of such questions be B. **c)** How many questions did you not read in the exam, but knew the answer when you saw them after the paper? Let the number of such questions be C.

So the obvious question would be: How do I achieve this score improvement?

An individual's total score improvement potential would be given by $A \times 5 + B \times 4 + C \times 4$.

So the obvious question would be: How do I achieve this score improvement?

Let us focus on the first of these categories - taking care of silly errors. The first thing you should realise is that silly errors can further be defined into three broad types:

i) Errors of calculation: One of my students (an IIT alumnus) committed the error of calculating $3 \times 3 = 6$ in his CAT. The result? A drop of five marks in net scores, leading to a crucial percentile drop. Obviously, these errors would be committed in the QA and DI sections only.

ii) Process-based silly errors: A single-step error in solving a question. Again, obviously an error that would be committed in the QA and DI sections only. **iii) Over reading errors:** Questions you get incorrect due to the fact that you did not read it properly. This error might occur in any of the three sections, including English. Your preparation plan should include processes to overturn each of these three categories.

Issue 1: Tackling calculation errors - How do you explain an IITian making an error like $3 \times 3 = 6$? Does he not know this? Obviously, there are explanations outside the ordinary, which induce such errors. This is what makes the CAT tough (If you recollect, in the last few articles, we have been concentrating on demonstrating why the CAT paper is actually easy).

When an IIT topper can be induced to make such errors, what would happen to a normal student?

The first and foremost thing you should realise while preparing is that when you are taking the CAT, the entire potential of your brain will not be available to you. Your mind will be in such a state that you might be forced to even check $2+2$.

So remember, the basic principle is that if in your normal day to day preparation, you can do something by using an excess of 80 to 90% of your mind's capacity, you would not be able to execute that thinking in the CAT paper.

What you need to realise is that unless you train yourself to be able to execute your thought processes under intense unrelenting pressure, any preparation for the CAT, by and large, makes no sense.

In our next article in this series, we will throw more light on this issue.

TAMING THE CAT

MANAGING PRESSURE IS THE CRUCIAL DIFFERENTIATOR THAT SETS CHAMPIONS APART WHEN IT COMES TO ACING THE CAT. ARUN SHARMA PROVIDES HANDY TIPS THAT ENABLE YOU TO PERFORM WELL EVEN UNDER PRESSURE

Competitive exams like the CAT can often prove tougher than they actually are owing to the pressure that inevitably builds up. There is a major difference between being able to solve a question in practice and being able to execute the same solving process under intense pressure. This is the only reason why many underperform in the exam. The dominant emotion in the hour after coming out of the CAT examination for almost all candidates is –“How did I miss this logic?” or “Why was I not able to think this way inside the examination hall?” Students who have started taking mock exams have probably already experienced this.

Look at it in the context of how just five to seven more questions solved correctly could make the difference between a 70 percentile and a 99 percentile result and how most 70 percentilers never believe that they have it in them to make it. Perhaps if you could learn to be able to perform despite the pressure, you too would be able to make this jump.

Using sport as an analogy of a pressure situation, you would realise that there is a difference in the level of pressure when the big points are on. For instance, give 100 club level tennis players a tennis ball and ask them to serve and you would see that perhaps a lot of them would be able to hit aces, but ask them to do it at a 15-40 point in a Wimbledon final- and you would need a Federer or a Rafael Nadal to do it. Or for that matter throw a cricket ball to your average batsman and you would be hit for a six by many, but you would require a champion batsman when the whole world is watching and six runs are needed off the last ball to win a world T-20 final.

The point here is that you should recognise the difference between performing under pressure and performing when the stakes are low. The transition from being good at something and being a champion, is the rare ability to perform under pressure.

The obvious question that arises then is:

“What does one do?”

First: From your past behaviour patterns check how you have performed under pressure in the past. Principally there are only two types of reactions to pressure a) Pressure improves performance: If you have this rare ability consider yourself blessed- all champions that have ever lived in this world had this ability.

b) Performance dips when you are under pressure- This is the normal bad habit that most of us pick up during our formative years. If you belong to this category, you really need to undergo a transmutation otherwise you will only be able to solve 50-70% of what you know when you take the CAT. **Second:** Elevate the level of your performance, elevate the level of your work quality, and create an obsession for excellence in your life

The secret to making this transition is to think in terms of time frames. When do you need to become great? When do you need to create an obsession for excellence? When do you need to elevate the level of your work, your life?

The answer: You only need to do it for the next five minutes. And then the next five, and then the next five...

You have 288 five minute time frames in a day to live. Dhirubhai Ambani said once that if someone says that he works 15 hours a day he is lying. Great champions are able to use about 120-140 five minute time frames in a day.

Who can stop you from being the greatest individual you can be for the next five minutes? Only yourself! Stop being serious about your results, start being sincere about your work. This simple shift

will take you a long way.

Third: Ensure that you take your learnings to the point where they become your reaction — your reflex, ie the unconscious competence level.

Remember, pressure does not affect your reflexes. Pressure can only play tricks with your mind when you ask your mind to

think. If you are responding to questions in CAT through reflex-based thought processes rather than thought out thought processes, pressure will not affect you.

Thus, while you can trust yourself to do $12+17$ even under pressure, your trust on your ability to calculate something like 27×44 under pressure would obviously be much lower.

The tragedy for most aspirants is that they prepare only to the point of knowing something. If you want to bell the CAT you need to reach a point in your preparations where you not only know, but you also know that you know.

Smart CAT

BREAKING UP THE CAT PORTION INTO CLEARLY DEFINED SEGMENTS CAN GO A LONG WAY IN IMPROVING YOUR OVERALL SCORE. ARUN SHARMA GIVES YOU THE LOWDOWN ON HOW TO MAKE THESE DIVISIONS

One of the key problems that students repeatedly face when they are preparing for the CAT, is the uncertainty built into their lives due to the problem of managing multiple lines of work at the same time.

In fact, if you were to look at it, you would see three sections to prepare for. Most aspirants organize their preparations by dividing their work based on these three lines. A major issue that students often face is creating a schedule of work which would balance preparations for each of the three sections. Ideally, you would be better off by creating a preparation outline that engulfs 16 independent lines of preparation. You would need to manage your preparation in these 16 different lines in order to prepare for the CAT in particular and management entrance exams in general.

THESE LINES OF PREPARATION ARE:

Six lines of preparation in quantitative aptitude, four lines of preparation in language, four lines of preparation in data interpretation and logical reasoning, one line of preparation in calculations and most importantly, one line of preparation which you can call your 'self belief'. The six lines of preparation in quantitative aptitude are:

Block 1 (Number systems + progressions)

Block 2 (Averages + allegation)

Block 3 (Percentages, profit and loss, ratio and proportions, interests, time and work, time speed and distance)

Block 4 (Geometry and mensuration),

Block 5 (Functions, inequalities, logarithms and quadratic equations)

Block 6 (Permutations and combinations, probability)

In general, you need to realize the following issues with respect to Quants preparation:

1) Block 1 and Block 5 given above are the most important for CAT and XAT as also for most other good MBA entrance exams like IIFT, SNAP etc.

2) Do not prepare yourself only to the point of portion coverage rather take your learning in every block to the level of reflex. Work on transforming your beliefs- where you take yourself not only to the point of knowing something but also knowing that you know it. Perhaps this issue is much more important than your covering your portion for your preparations.

After all, every student who has ever taken the CAT, has always known about the importance of Block 1. Yet, for instance when the CAT 2006 paper gave 12 questions out of 25 {48 marks out of 100 where the 90 percentile score in Quants was 25-28} over 90% aspirants were not able to solve more than two-three questions out of these 12. Or for that matter, also consider the fact that in the CAT 2007 exam, there were around 9-10 questions that could be clearly classified as Block 1 questions, yet when it came to solving these the QA sectional cut off clearly showed us that not more than 10% of CAT aspirants last year were able to solve more than five questions in the whole section. If only aspirants would realize that there is a difference between having studied a chapter, and having ingrained it.

Moving on to the English section of preparation, the four lines of preparation for English language are-

1) **Word level skills**- Comprising your vocabulary, your knowledge of phrasal verbs and idioms as well as your ability to solve questions based on the usage of vocabulary.

2) **Sentence level skills**- Comprising your ability to comprehend texts from various sources, your ability to understand long and complex sentences from various topics. Also your ability to solve FIJ types of questions and other question types that might qualify under sentence level. Sentence level

preparations also critically determine your ability to understand and distinguish between what two or more options are saying. **3) Paragraph level skills-** Comprising your ability to connect the meanings of multiple sentences that form paragraphs- on various topics written in varying degrees of complexity. Typical question types that come under paragraph level preparations can be classified as: Paragraph jumbles and critical reasoning.

4) Passage level skills- Comprising your ability to connect the meanings of multiple paragraphs to develop the comprehension of a passage.

The fact of the matter is that the CAT paper left aspirants across India confused when it came to the English section. It is said that the options were so close that 2.5 lakh aspirants had major problems in understanding the difference between the options.

For instance, imagine the difference between the following two statements: **1) The cat is on the mat**

2) The mat is on the cat

The question here is: Is there a distinction between these two statements? Can you see it, and if you can, why on earth can't 2.5 lakh CAT aspirants do the same for these options to the reading comprehension questions in the CAT 2007 paper.

The question was: "What is the thematic highlight of the passage?" Options included:

1) In the absence of strong biological linkages, reciprocal roles provide the mechanism for coordinating human behavior.

2) In the absence of reciprocal roles, biological linkages provide the mechanism for coordinating human behavior.

The options continued:

3) Human behavior is independent of biological linkages and reciprocal roles **4) Human behavior depends on biological linkages and reciprocal roles.**

And if you cannot read these sentences and understand the critical differences between the idealization being transferred to you by the question setter, do you really deserve a seat at the IIMs?

More importantly, do you end up getting a direction regarding how to prepare for the language section- Should you be studying English or should you be studying logic when you are preparing for the verbal ability and reading comprehension section of the CAT?

CAT wise

DATA INTERPRETATION AND LOGICAL REASONING REMAINS ONE OF THE LEAST PREPARED FOR SECTIONS. ARUN SHARMA TELLS YOU HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS SECTION, WHICH CARRIES ONE-THIRD WEIGHTAGE OF THE CAT

IN the last article we had discussed the lines of preparations that you need to follow when you are preparing for the Verbal Ability and the Quantitative Aptitude section. In today's article we would like to focus on the all important section of Data Interpretation & Logical Reasoning.

One thing you need to realize is that even though this section has always had one-third the weightage of the CAT paper, yet it remains one of the least prepared for sections. Perhaps, the major reason for the same is that unlike the other sections- it is practically impossible to define portion in this section.

Thus, while there is a definite portion that can be defined for Quants, and at least some contours of a portion definition for English preparation, students and trainers are at a loss when it comes to defining what to study for in this section.

Perhaps, part of the solution to this problem is to come out of your conventional preparation mode - the way everyone prepares for university examinations- define portion, study theory, practice questions, revise theory.

Instead, what you would need to focus on is to develop an ability to understand what the basic unit of learning is, when it comes to DI. I would tend to advocate to you the skills set approach to developing your DI & LR skills.

Looking at it from another point of view- as we had said last week- preparations for the DI & LR section need to be organized under four basic umbrellas-

1) Traditional Data Interpretation- This is the conventional DI question based on charts and graphs. Skill sets required to do well in this question type include the following:

- a) Your knowledge of some basic areas of quantitative aptitude. Chapters which you need to be thorough with are Ratio & Proportions, Percentages, Progression, Basic concepts of numbers, averages, alligations.
- b) The ability to understand data and identify variables and their relationships.
- c) Calculation skills- you would be well advised to hone your ability to add two digit numbers, calculate and compare ratios and also develop your ability to approximate calculations involving big numbers.

2) Advanced Reasoning Based Data Interpretations: first made its appearance in 2003 CAT and can be typically defined as questions that have some data based information running behind them while at the same time one would need to make certain logical deductions. Unlike, traditional data Interpretation questions, in these questions data is normally presented in a disguised format. So obviously the skill you need to develop for doing well in this question type is to develop your ability to interpret data and discover hidden linkages between the various variables presented.

One sees a lot of aspirants being shaken by these question types and one knows for a fact that more than 80 percent of the people preparing for CAT are scared of this question type.

To illustrate what I mean, let us take a simple situation.

THE ANATOMY OF AN ADVANCED REASONING BASED DI QUESTION:

Suppose there is a narrator of a story who tells you that there is a situation wherein there is a bus going from Delhi to Bombay and it has two stops in between say at Ahmedabad and Pune. Next, he tells you the following statements:

- a) When the bus left Delhi, there were 80 passengers.
- b) When the bus left Ahmedabad, there were 83 passengers.

c) When the bus arrived at Bombay there were 75 passengers in the bus.

What sense can you make out of this information? Suppose someone makes a conclusion that in Ahmedabad there must have been three new passengers who got into the bus. Would that thinking be correct?

Obviously, most of you would be shouting out loud in your minds as you read this- that we cannot conclude that there were three new passengers who got into the bus.

The difference between the number of passengers who left Delhi and the number of passengers who left Ahmedabad must obviously be a function of two distinct variables-

i) The number of people who got down from the bus,

ii) The number of people who got into the bus.

Thus, obviously the only thing you can conclude here is that in Ahmedabad, there were three extra people who got in (when compared to the number of passengers who got down from the bus).

Why are we using this article to tell you the obvious? Why are we wasting your time telling you this:

Well consider one of the toughest questions that have happened in the CAT DI sections ever:

The year is 2089. Beijing, London, New York, and Paris are in contention to host the 2096 Olympics.

The eventual winner is determined through several rounds of voting by members of the IOC with each member representing a different city. All the four cities in contention are also represented in IOC.

- In any round of voting, the city receiving the lowest number of votes in that round gets eliminated. The survivor after the last round of voting gets to host the event.

- A member is allowed to cast votes for at most two different cities in all rounds of voting combined. Hence, a member becomes ineligible to cast a cost in a given round if both the cities (s)he voted for in earlier rounds are out of contention in that round of voting. (Note: Your interpretation of this sentence should be that, this is one way of becoming ineligible to vote- if you voted for a particular city in the first round and that city got eliminated, and if you voted for another city in the second round and that city too got eliminated in that round, then you cannot vote in the third round. Passenger getting out of the bus anyone?)

- A member is also ineligible to cost vote in a round if the city (s)he represents is in contention in that round of voting. (Note: Do you realise that this is giving us a way of making a member who is ineligible to vote eligible? Also do you see that after every round starting after the first round itself, exactly one member will become eligible to vote. Do you see passengers getting into the bus? One passenger at a time?)

- As long as the member is eligible,(s)he must vote and vote for only one candidate city in any round of voting.

Now with this information if you are given the information that 83 people voted in the second round and there is missing information about the number of people who voted in the first round- can't you realize that 82 people must have voted in the first round? (Obviously, because from the first round to the second round only one new person would be eligible to vote. The rule for making people ineligible to vote is only going to come into the picture in the third round for the first time- so the difference between the number of people who voted in the first round must be one less than the number who voted in the second round).

Further if you are told that, in the third round 75 people voted. Can you see that 1 person must have entered and 9 people must have dropped out? And those nine people must have voted for the city eliminated in the first round and the also voted for the city eliminated for in the second round.

(Isn't it the same logic as: Bus leaves from Delhi with an unknown number of passengers, reaches Ahmedabad and when it leaves Ahmedabad there are 83 passengers. It is also known that no one is allowed to get down in Ahmedabad and exactly 1 person entered in Ahmedabad. Further, one person more enters in Pune and when the bus leaves Pune there are 75 passengers in the bus. So, obviously

nine people must have got down in Pune).

What surprises, is the fact that this question is amongst the toughest questions to have appeared in CAT. And if people cannot correlate the logic of what they see in their daily lives to what is asked in CAT DI- the CAT can continue to merrily remain a mystery for lakhs of aspirants every year.

The other two lines of preparation in this section are:

3) CAT Type Reasoning

4) Non CAT Reasoning

We would talk about these and many more crucial issues in our next article of this series.

Deeper into DI

THE DATA INTERPRETATION (DI) AND LOGICAL REASONING SECTIONS REPRESENT A BACKDOOR ENTRY TO THE IIMs. ARUN SHARMA TELLS YOU WHY THIS SECTION REQUIRES THE LEAST EFFORT WHEN COMPARED TO THE OTHER THREE

IN our previous article in this series we had started discussing an outline for Data Interpretation (DI) preparations --- wherein we defined four lines of preparation for DI and Logical Reasoning (LR):

- 1) Traditional Data Interpretation
- 2) Advanced Reasoning Based Data Interpretation
- 3) CAT Type Reasoning
- 4) Non CAT Reasoning

In today's article we continue our focus on DI and LR preparations. Let us tackle this point by point: The DI and LR section represents a shortcut into the IIMs - This is perhaps a backdoor entry into the IIMs and we have our reasons for saying so. Basically, if you were to look at the preparation processes for the three parallel sections that the CAT tests you for; namely Quantitative Aptitude, Verbal Ability and Reading Comprehension and Data Interpretation and Logical Reasoning; and compare these processes, you would realize that this section requires the minimum effort as it also affords the possibility of minimum turnaround time.

So, if you were aiming at moving from a range of say 50 percentile to 90+ percentile in any of the three sections of CAT, the DI section would be the fastest as well as the one involving the least effort. Hence, ignore this section at your own peril. A moot point one realizes while saying this is that unfortunately, for the vast majority of CAT takers, DI remains the least prepared of the three areas for CAT exam preparation.

In our last article, we had raised this issue and also reasoned that this occurs mainly due to the lack of a clear preparation outline for DI prep. So, obviously the question that arises in your mind as you read this is: "What should I do that would help me improve my DI percentiles and solving abilities?" And more importantly: "What can one do in a 90 day time-frame to improve DI?"

We realize that a lot of you out there preparing for the CAT 2008 exam might be having serious doubts about your ability to improve your DI score at all- especially in the context of the fact that every year there are a lot of students whose score gets stuck in DI. So, we would like to make the following points for your benefit:

Adopt a two-pronged approach:

Skills Development
Exposure creation

Perhaps, the first thing you need to realize as you try to create a strategy is that since you cannot adopt a portion coverage approach, you should create a skills development approach plus an exposure to problems approach while trying to improve your DI scores.

You need to distinguish clearly between these two:

a) By skills development we mean that there are certain specific skills that are essentially tested in DI. As a CAT and management aspirant you first need to identify these skills, and then create a regimen for the development of the same. To further expand this point, suppose one has a simple set of DI containing four questions that are based on percentage changes and ratio calculations — If such a set of questions is given to three lakh CAT aspirants to solve under test conditions, the results would show that even in these four questions there will be a great variance in the scores across the nation. Not only that, even amongst the people who get everything correct.

Our question to every CAT aspirant reading this - Why should you allow your competition to have an advantage over you? Either score wise or time wise, in simple percentage change and ratio calculation questions. And, if this gap does exist, ie even if you can solve all these four questions correctly but would take three minutes more than the 99 percentilers, should you not do whatever it takes to overcome the gap.

b) By exposure to problems we mean that your preparation objective should be to get to a point where you have solved so many question sets of DI that belief wise you should be able to tell yourself: "What else can they throw at me?" or the even stronger belief: "Give me anything to solve and if it is DI, I can take any bet that I will solve it."

The idea of DI preparation has to be to take yourself to the comfort zone (confidence wise). In other words, when you pick the next set your mind should expect to crack it rather than be cracked by it.

The obvious question which arises in your mind as you read this is: "How many question sets in DI do I need to solve to get to this point?"

The answer, from our experience, is that you should reach this point if you solve around 750-1000 question sets (not questions) and are able to learn from the solving experience you gain through every set. One word of caution though — while doing this you will need to ensure that you solve the correct sets of questions which will expose you to all kinds of logics.

Thus, for instance, you should expose yourself to questions based on tournaments, questions based on progressions, questions based on maximizing and minimizing constraints and questions based on Venn diagrams, to name a few.

So, obviously the task set for the exposure to problems approach is pretty easy to determine. You can do the math yourself — If you need to do 1,000 question sets in 90 days time it would leave you with around 11 sets per day.

For those of you who have already begun to think that there is no preparation time left, take heart. Turnaround times in DI can be as short as 30 days. Just work in a task oriented fashion, set tasks for yourself and complete them.

In our next article in this series, we will deal with the skills development approach in more detail.

SKILL-SETS DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

DATA INTERPRETATION (DI) IS ALL ABOUT A SET OF SKILLS, WHICH IF YOU CAN IDENTIFY AND DEVELOP CORRECTLY, IS PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT TASK IN YOUR DI PREPARATION. ARUN SHARMA GIVES YOU THE LOW-DOWN

IN our last article in this series, we had written about the process of preparation for data interpretation (DI) and had advocated a two dimensional approach (skill development + exposure creation) in conjunction with four umbrella approach for the section — the four lines of preparation when you prepare for DI and LR sections of all management exams — these umbrellas being: traditional data interpretation; advanced reasoning based data interpretation; CAT type reasoning; non CAT reasoning. Today, we would like to focus on the skills development approach for DI preparation.

The key point here is that DI is all about a set of skills, which if you can identify and develop correctly, is perhaps the most important task in your DI preparation. Even when you are continuing your question exposure work, the key issue is: ‘Are you able to identify the skill set and go through a learning curve on the same?’

What we want to tell you here can be best explained by an example. Consider the following set of questions that had appeared in the DI section of the CAT 2007 paper. Remember that when you are solving this set you are playing for 20 marks in CAT-2007. The value of 20 marks in the paper can be understood if you look at it from the viewpoint that it would convert a 70 percentile to 90+ percentile and an early 90s score to perhaps a 99+ score.

We would first ask you to try to solve this question set. Given the nature of this set of questions, it can be safely expected that most aspirants should be able to solve this with ease, especially those who are scoring over 70-80 percentile. The only thing that would differ would be the time dimension. While a 70 percentiler might take somewhere between 10-12 minutes to solve this, a 100 percentiler in DI would be able to attempt these in 5-6 minutes.

Try this: A healthdrink company's research and development department is trying to make various diet formulations, which can be used for certain specific purposes. It is considering a choice of five alternative ingredients (O, P, Q, R, and S), which can be used in different proportions in the formulations. The table gives the composition of these ingredients.

The cost per-unit of these ingredients is O: 150; P: 50; Q: 200; R: 500; S: 100.

1. For a recuperating patient, the doctor recommended a diet containing 10% minerals and at least 30% protein. In how many different ways can we prepare this diet by mixing at least two ingredients?

(1) One (2) Two (3) Three (4) Four (5) None

Estimated time for a 100 percentiler to solve this: 5-10 seconds

2. Which among the following is the formulation having the lowest cost per unit for a diet having 10% fat and at least 30% protein? The diet has to be formed by mixing two ingredients.

(1) P & Q (2) P & S (3) P & R (4) Q & S (5) R and S

Estimated time for a 100 percentiler to solve this: 30-40 seconds

3. In what proportion P, Q and S should be mixed to make a diet having at least 60% carbohydrate at the lowest per-unit cost?

(1) 2:1:3 (2) 4:1:2 (3) 2:1:4 (4) 3:1:2 (5) 4:1:1

Estimated time for a 100 percentiler to solve this: 30 seconds

4. The company is planning to launch a balanced diet required for growth needs of adolescent children. This diet must contain at least 30% each of carbohydrate and protein, no more than 25% fat and at least 5% minerals. Which one of the following combinations of equally mixed ingredients is feasible?

(1) O & P (2) R & S (3) P & S (4) Q & R (5) O and S

Estimated time for a 100 percentiler to solve this: 30 seconds

SOLUTION 1: OPTION 1

10% minerals is only feasible if we mix O & Q. Any other mix of two ingredients would not give us 10% minerals since one of the ingredients would contain less than 10% and the other would contain at max 10%. The average mineral in the mixture would always be less than 10 in such a case.

SOLUTION 2: OPTION 4

P & S are the cheapest ingredients. However both of them contain no fat. Hence, the second option can be ruled out. Since P is the least cost ingredient, we will try to use P maximum and any other ingredient only to the extent required to meet the constraints. Since P & S is not feasible, using P & O can generate the next lowest cost but that is not an option. Hence, we try the next cheapest combination possible, P & Q. This too will not be feasible since P&Q can never give us 30% protein.

Hence option 1 is ruled out. Option 3 would give us a feasible mix if we use three units of P and one unit of R. The cost for four units of the mixture would be $50 \times 3 + 500 = 650$ and the average cost would be $650/4 = 137.5$. We now need to check the remaining two options to see whether this cost can be beaten — and it is apparent that for the fourth option if we take a mix of Q & S in the ratio 4:1 the total cost for five units would be 600 and the average cost would be 120. It can be seen that the fifth option will give a higher value. Hence, Q and S is the ideal combination.

SOLUTION 3: OPTION 5

Objective obviously is to maximize P in the mix. Also, it can be seen that option 2 and 5 are the only possibilities (as no other option will give you 60% carbohydrates). Between options 2 and 5, the latter will always be cheaper. You do not need to check this.

SOLUTION 4: OPTION 5

O & P fails because of proteins, R&S fails because of carbohydrates, P & S fails because of Minerals and Q & R fails because of carbohydrates. Only O & S satisfies all conditions.

By any standard, this set of questions would qualify as pretty simple in the context of the CAT exam. So, the key issue we need to consider is that of the time differential between a 100 percentiler in DI and a 60 percentiler in DI. Obviously a 100 percentiler is much faster in reacting and processing the information while solving the question, because his skill-sets in doing the same things is much faster. Perhaps an analogy to this can be taken from the domain of sports, in cricket, anyone can play a bowler throwing the ball at 50kmph, but it takes a person with special skills to face a bowler bowling 100 miles an hour.

We would like to end by giving you a brief outline of the skill-set required for preparing for DI. The skill-set can be divided into two dimensions:

Calculative skills: A function of your ability to add two digit numbers, your ability to multiply two digit numbers, your ability to calculate percentage values and your ability to compare ratios (big and small).

Mathematical knowledge based skills: Number systems-based skills (important for advanced reasoning based DI), venn diagrams, averages and alligations, progressions, percentages and ratios. Focus on sharpening your skills in these areas and you should definitely be able to create a percentile jump in your scores.

PLAN YOUR APPROACH

PROPER PLANNING OF YOUR CAREER CAN HELP YOU DO BETTER IN THE CAT. NOT ONLY DOES IT HELP REDUCE YOUR PRESSURE,IT HELPS YOU PUT YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD AS WELL. ARUN SHARMA ELABORATES

In today's article we would like to move out of CAT specific talks and turn our focus towards issues and perspectives that you need to keep in mind while planning for an MBA career. Many of our readers have been sending us queries on Education Times Counselors forum about such general but crucial issues which we address today.

We would try to provide a comprehensive answer to queries about these and how proper planning of your career can actually help you do better in the CAT as you can definitely reduce the pressure on yourself while taking the examination. Let us deal with this issue by issue:

Issue I: Form filling - how to decide on which forms to fill and which institutes to apply to.

Well, our take on this is that it would depend on your objectives while you are preparing for the MBA entrance exam season. Broadly there could be two approaches that one could take for the MBA entrance preparation process — both equally valid and perhaps equally advisable.

Approach 1: The 'Have to Get in this year approach.' This approach (as is clear from the name itself) does not allow an individual any flexibility with respect to the time-frame he/she has in terms of making it to a B-school — as you have to get in this year and join whatever college comes up and then try to make the best out of what you have.

Obviously, aspirants who for some reason/s do not have an option to hold back for a year and take another shot at the management entrance exam season take such an approach. Aspirants preparing with such an objective would obviously need to focus on getting everything right in this attempt. Quite naturally, this would lead to building pressure on them, which normally would have a tendency to reduce performance. Such aspirants have a tendency to take things too seriously and any hints of non-performance either in the mock CATs they take or a couple of unproductive minutes in the actual CAT is taken as an indicator of a life lived as a second class citizen. Second class compared to the IIT and IIM pass outs.

Naturally this thinking comes out of the fact that aspirants taking this approach have to make do with whatever institute they get into — in that matter they really do not have much of a choice. If you belong to this category of aspirants, the biggest favour you could perhaps do to yourself and your chances in the MBA exam season ahead is to show yourself that in case you do not make it to the IIMs then it is not the end of the road. Suppose you had to join a third-level B School, does it mean that you are always going to remain a second class citizen in corporate life; wherever the IIM passouts go you would have to bow to them?

Talk to any person who has experienced 10-15 years of corporate life and he/she would tell you that such is not the case. People from second level and third level B-schools regularly outshine people from the IIMs. It is not like the Civil Services, where once you get a second class service you would always have to bow down in front of people who beat you in one exam 30 years ago. So, perhaps all aspirants who find themselves in the 'have to get in this year stage' should relax a little. Form your plans of how you are going to make it to the top irrespective of how you do in this year's CAT/XAT etc. That way the risk factor you enter into the CAT with will be reduced and you would be ironically giving your

best shot.

If you do not create this plan of action, then even a little slip upon the D-day will lead to a psychological storm inside your mind, heart and stomach leaving you with no clear thinking — leading to gross underperformance in the exam. That's because of the tendency to create an equation between underperformance in the exam and a second-class corporate existence.

Granted, there is a lot of difference if you pass out from an IIM versus you do not. However, what you need to realise is that there are many ways in which you could overcome a failure at the CAT. One of which is the option of a second MBA. In case you do not make it to the IIMs then there would always be the option of doing an MBA from whichever best institute you make it to, and then build your working experience for 3-5 years and then plan to do a second MBA either in the form of an executive MBA from IIMs or ISB or even by planning to get into a top international B-school like Harvard, and so on.

Five years down the line you will have a superior bio-data than people who beat you to the IIMs this year. The point is that in case you find out at the end of the MBA exams process that you were not able to enter a B-school you had aspired for, there are a lot of ways of getting ahead in life

Approach 2: The 'I will make it to IIMs or a top B-school in the next three years.' Such people have the luxury of being in a no-risk zone. They can easily tell themselves that I will only enter an MBA this year in the case I make the B-school I aspire for. If I do not, my plan anyways is to get into the IIMs in 2009 or 2010 or 2011 or perhaps even 2012. I know of a lot of students who took this two-three year approach to making it into the IIMs and got in only in their third or later approach.

There are two obvious advantages of this approach —

- 1) Lesser pressure while taking the exams allowing you to perform freely
- 2) As you go on experiencing the CAT you would ideally end up developing your intelligence — if you are working through the right approach for the CAT. So, as you go for your second, third, fourth attempts, if you keep incrementing your knowledge, skills and exposure in the right direction you would end up making it eventually

The only risks inherent in this approach that you need to guard against are:

- The tendency to develop a losing mindset with respect to the CAT — something that you can guard against by working on the development of your intelligences
- The inability to augment your bio-data during the interim time.

So, our advice to those taking this approach is that you should focus on gainfully applying yourself to your bio-data building. Gaining work-ex is a must in such a case and you can also additionally join other professional courses in the interim or even try to create a reading framework in a particular direction that would help you develop your knowledge and exposure as well as the confidence to defend yourself in case you are asked the dreaded question: 'What were you doing after your graduation?'

CATch it, if you can

YOU CAN IMPROVE YOUR TEST SCORE BY DOING A CLOSE ANALYSIS OF YOUR BEHAVIOURAL PATTERN DURING THE DURATION OF A TEST. ARUN SHARMA TELLS HOW

With just two months left for the all-important CAT exam, most of you must be revising the syllabus, desperately covering new topics and definitely taking mock-tests. This time-frame is most crucial for your CAT preparation. However, we have observed over the time that most CAT aspirants are unable to utilise this time-frame well. And the typical experience for most students is that their percentile scores get stuck in a certain range in whatever mock tests they are taking. In today's article we will concentrate on a crucial question that must have been appearing in the minds of CAT aspirants at this stage — "How do I increase my test scores?" We want to communicate to you, at this stage, that a lot is possible in this direction — provided you are able to find the right things to do. So what can be done? You can work in three directions to improve your test score:

- Ability improvement
- Belief improvement
- Test taking behaviour improvement

In this article we would be elaborating on the third issue — the test taking behaviour improvement.

In a past article, we mentioned that the statistics of CAT 2007 revealed — while a score of about 110 out of 300 was sufficient to score 99 percentile, a score of 70 plus gave a score of about 80 percentile. It is a moot point that a student scoring in a range of 80 percentile would think that s/he was away from cracking CAT. However, we believe that improving test scores by around 40 to 50 marks does not necessarily require a year's preparations. It could be a matter of just a few days to a few weeks — provided you hit upon the correct strategy and work dimensions to execute your preparation. For every student, who will be able to increase test scores on his/her own, there would be over 25 aspirants whose scores would get stuck in a range, which can at best be considered sub-optimal when considered against the backdrop of his/her abilities.

In context of the marking pattern used over the last couple of years — four marks per question and negative one for a wrong answer — increasing your scores by approximately 50 marks could just mean overturning about 10 errors.

A close analysis of behavioural patterns during the test can help in improving the test score.

Your test score is directly dependant on your ability, as well as behaviour pattern in each of the three sections of the paper. However, even while the multitudes focus heavily on their ability aspect, little or no attention is given to the all-important aspect of behaviour.

You will be surprised how much change you can create in your test score by closely analysing your behavioural pattern during the test. The primary reason for this is that if you go back into the way your mind worked during the exam, you will realise that for major time chunks, during the exam, your mind was not working at all! You were thinking sub-optimally. Perhaps this is the reason why most students have had the experience of having got stuck and not being able to solve a question during the test period or being able to solve the same question without the examination pressure within a matter of seconds.

What are the components that you need to measure under behaviour patterns?

1) Your inherent and expressed insecurity with a particular section: Your inherent insecurity is the

amount of residual fear that you carry within your mind with respect to a particular section. If you carry negative beliefs in your mind about a particular section (and/or a particular question type) it is bound to impede on your ability to score well in that area. Your expressed insecurity is the amount of your inherent insecurity that is brought out while solving the paper.

A negative belief that tells you: "I cannot solve Quant or data interpretation questions or English section" is the main reason for these insecurities. If you allow any of these insecurities to remain in your mind, it will hurt you badly inside the CAT.

Hence, your target before CAT is to remove these insecurities. In other words, in your mind you should shift to "I can" from "I cannot." While doing this, your focus should be to deal with each section by breaking it into different question types/chapters. We will be discussing this process of dealing with insecurity in each section independently in later articles in this series.

2) Your behavioural pattern in the first 5-10 minutes of the test: This time period can be defined as the warm up time during a test. Students make the mistake of either being overcautious or over nervous during this time period.

3) Your behavioural pattern in the last 15-20 minutes of the test: We have often observed good students falter in the last 15-20 minutes of the test paper. Does it happen to you too? If yes, you need to train your mind to keep its bearings when the pressure is on.

4) Your reaction to not being able to solve a question: There is a tendency among students to carry psychological scars of not being able to solve one question or a set of questions into the next set of questions. If you also have this tendency — you better guard against it through doses of positive thinking.

5) Your tendency to hold on to a question/inability to move out of a question within the appropriate time: Every exam that students take up until CAT, the philosophy is to keep trying a question till you crack it. In CAT, the paradigm changes. Here you might be more rewarded for leaving questions unsolved rather than trying it from different angles and wasting your time. For all you know the next question might be a matter of 15 seconds. Hence, if you are having the tendency to stick to a question, you need to train yourself to leave it as soon as it conveys the first danger signals to you.

The above negative behaviour patterns have a profound impact on your test scores. Unfortunately, while students work very hard on practising questions, they miss out on the opportunity to raise their scores by making minute adjustments to their behavioural pattern.

English Score Made Easy

YOU CAN IMPROVE YOUR TEST SCORES IN ENGLISH BY EMPLOYING A FEW SHORT TERM STRATEGIES. ARUN SHARMA TELLS HOW

The question "How can I develop my test scores in English?" is an oft-repeated question that is asked by students across the country. The question and more importantly the answer to it becomes of paramount importance in the context of the CAT being less than two months away- and most aspirants facing down the barrel when it comes to English preparations. The answer to this question differs with respect to the abilities of different levels of students and also the time available to develop their scores.

The strategy and the recommended exercises change for students preparing in the short run as against those preparing in the long run. In today's article I would like to concentrate on short term strategies to develop one's scores especially because the CAT exam is less than two months away.

The most commonly asked question types in the VA & RC sections can be divided into:

- Questions testing sentence level skills: Appropriate word usage questions, facts inference judgment questions and grammatical error questions come under this category.
- Questions testing paragraph level skills: Paragraph jumbles and critical reasoning (consisting of question types like strengthening and weakening arguments, concluding sentences, summaries etc) are included in this category.
- Questions testing passage level skills: This comprises mainly of reading comprehension.

Each of these question types concentrates on testing the aspirant on his/her ability to understand sentences, paragraphs and passages. Needless to say, no matter how good or bad your English might be, your focus of preparation has to be on trying to improve your ability to grasp the meanings of sentences, paragraphs and passages on a variety of topics.

Before we start to look at the specific requirements for English, we first need to understand the most basic problem for CAT aspirants in the English section. If you were to ask test takers about how they fared in English in a given test, most test takers would be unable to give you an estimate of how many questions they would have solved correctly. In fact, this lack of awareness about an error made while solving an English question often becomes the biggest hurdle for most students in order to improve their scores. Besides, it also results in the creation of huge amounts of uncertainty in the minds of test takers--- they are not able to realise whether they have done enough in this section. The carry over of this uncertainty to the other sections, results in an overall drop in confidence and ultimately in the scores.

Any attempt at improving your scores in VA & RC has to necessarily address this issue.

The best short term method for improving your language test scores is to become aware of the error types that occur while you solve different question types. It is only then that you will be able to identify the specific thought error that you are committing - and only after identification of the same can you work to remove it.

The following process if adopted thoroughly has the potential to help you remove the repetitive errors that you are making and hence develop your test scores.

Step 1: Solve an exercise with or without time limits. While doing this be sure to work on one type of question at a time.

Step 2: Without looking at the solutions, go back to every answer that you have marked. Evaluate the logic of each answer and based on your confidence in the logic you have used in marking the answer, mark each answer as:

- a) Definitely correct
- b) Probably correct
- c) Probably wrong
- d) Definitely wrong.

Step 3: Check your answers and find out your scores for each answer type as specified above.

Step 4: Analyze your errors based on the following error types:

Error Type 1: Definitely correct gone wrong: What was the specific logic that you missed out on while solving this question and then marking your answer as definitely correct.

Error Type 2: Probably correct gone right: Why were you not able to eliminate the incorrect option completely?

Error Type 3: Probably correct gone wrong: Why were you not able to spot the strength of the specific logic that supported the correct option.

Error Type 4: Probably wrong gone right: Why were you not able to eliminate the incorrect option completely? In fact, what made you think that the incorrect option was right??

Error Type 5: Probably wrong gone wrong: Why were you not able to spot the strength of the specific logic that supported the correct option.

Error Type 6: Definitely wrong gone wrong: You would only mark a question as definitely wrong, if you had somehow realized that the original logic you had used was incorrect. In such a case, you need to ask yourself the question: Why were you not able to spot the correct answer while solving the question for the first time?

Error Type 7: Definitely wrong gone right: You should have been able to identify the question as definitely right. Only goes to show that you never got a hang of the specific question (or it's options). In such a case, you need to identify the logical oversight that occurred during your analysis of the question that made you mark the answer as definitely wrong instead of definitely correct.

In my view, in case you are unable to solve a specific question in English, it means that the level of doubt inserted inside the question is beating you. Hence, the main thrust for short term preparation for English has to involve teaching yourself how to overcome the doubts that are currently beating you.

KEEPING THE FAITH

ONE OF THE GREATEST CHALLENGES YOU WILL FACE IN THE COUNTDOWN TO THE CAT EXAM IS KEEPING YOURSELF MOTIVATED AND BELIEVING IN YOUR ABILITY TO CRACK THE EXAM. ARUN SHARMA TELLS YOU WHY YOU NEED TO PREPARE FOR THE CAT AND NOT THE MOCK CAT

WHENEVER there has been any significant achievement in human history, there has always been at its core an underlying panorama of belief. Somewhere, sometimes, humans across history have told themselves that 'I can' and that has been the single most important reason for all human achievement.

So why are we talking about this at this point of time in this article? Well to tell you the least, we have our reasons for the same. Consider this letter we received from one of the multitudes of CAT aspirants, just last week: "I am a student preparing for CAT 2008. I wanted to take your help on how I should prepare in the last two months. My percentile varies between 80s and 90s. I feel in the last two mock CATs I have been under some kind of pressure to perform well and because of that I performed badly. I'm afraid what will happen on November 16, as the pressure then will be so high. Sir, please help and do tell me how to improve my percentile. I had been scoring around 95-96 in previous mock CATs but the two most recent one's have been very low."

For us, this e-mail is representative of the normal experiences and pressures that people preparing for the CAT come under. And at our end this is nothing new. Over the years we have seen the same happening to multitudes of CAT aspirants across the country. Perhaps, on the D-day while around three lakh people would enter the exam hall physically, only about 10,000 would enter the hall that day believing in their ability to crack the exam.

What is the reason behind this and what can be done to avoid it?

THE CAUSES

We call it the percentile syndrome. Around July to September each year, aspirants get onto the bandwagon of giving mock exams. The logic is pretty clear for most of them — if I am taking the CAT in November I need to practice the maximum number of mock papers prior to the D-day. So far so good.

But then, as is evident from the e-mail above, while mock CATs do serve the purpose of helping you practice, in our opinion their percentile scores and the consequent interpretation of the same does more harm than good. So, apart from the fortunate few who are able to score over 98-99 percentile consistently, percentiles in mock CATs only help demoralize most aspirants, the typical experience is that of hitting an upper limit of percentile score and there on getting frustrated due to not being able to breach this limit.

The result then is the creation of a self fulfilling prophecy about what percentile limit one is going to hit. So, individually in their own preparation processes, most people would already have attributed a certain percentile range to themselves — based on what percentiles they are getting in their mock CATs.

On the D-day, even before you start your paper, if you have already defined an upper limit for your percentile, it will play itself out as a self-fulfilling prophecy. This is, perhaps, both ridiculous and dangerous.

THE SOLUTIONS

Here are a few pointers that you should consider paying heed to:

1) Stop taking your percentiles seriously. Start focusing on your percentage of marks. Let the percentiles take care of themselves. Every year, for the past 5-6 years, approximately 30% of marks as a net score have been sufficient to get above 95 percentile in the CAT. About 40% has been pretty safe right through. Our advise to you is to focus on what percentage of marks you are able to score in the tests that you take. And what do you need to do to improve this percentage? The logic is that if the percentage is good enough a good percentile would follow.

2) Remember that the mock CATs are not the actual CATs. Prepare for the CAT and stop preparing for the mock CATs. The CAT paper is designed keeping in mind a lot of factors that institutes running coaching classes cannot even consider while designing their mock test papers. Just to give you an instance of this, in the DI and LR section of the CAT paper, pick up any question that has been asked in this section and you will find that no CAT question is longer than 6-8 steps for solving. However, when it comes to some mock papers you would realise that there are questions that are even 20 steps long.

3) Keep yourself on your side — perhaps the most important point at this time. The greatest wars are won and the biggest challenges are overcome if only you back yourself. The moment you start moving into negative belief system territory, you become your own enemy.

Perhaps the greatest challenge you face in this last stretch of preparation is to keep yourself on your side. Keep the faith, keep the belief going and fight till the last moment. Your battle for CAT gets over when the answer sheet is pulled out of your hand.

THERE'S STILL SCOPE FOR IMPROVEMENT

AS THE D-DAY APPROACHES, CAT ASPIRANTS SHOULD FOCUS ON ADDRESSING AREAS THAT HAVE A PAY-OFF WITHIN ONE MONTH. ARUN SHARMA TELLS YOU HOW YOU CAN UTILIZE THE TIME LEFT TO EFFECTIVELY IMPROVE YOUR CHANCES AT CAT 2008

THE last month of preparations is here and the focus has now shifted to applying finishing touches to one's preparation. Most aspirants would have already settled into their comfortable percentile ranges and would be quite resigned to whatever percentiles they are receiving. However, even at this stage, our firm belief remains that you can utilize the time left to effectively improve your chances at CAT 2008.

Remember, what you need to focus on now is to do the best you can — let the results take care of themselves. So obviously, the moot questions coming out of most students would be: What should I do at this stage of my preparations and how can I utilise my last month to maximise possible benefit?

The main thing to understand at this stage is that whatever you are trying to do, focus on things that have a pay-off within one month of work. In today's article we would try to focus on some processes for Quantitative Aptitude (QA). Following are the objectives you should focus on:

OBJECTIVES FOR QA

Get really good at what you know and know what they are going to mostly ask you. Hence, get really good at what they are mostly going to ask you.

What do we mean by this? A close analysis of past trends of the CAT shows that there is great emphasis on Block I and Block V chapters in QA (as defined earlier in this series). Just to remind those of you who have not followed this series — Block I consists of the chapters of Number Systems and Progressions. Block V consists of the chapters of Functions, Inequalities, Logs and Quadratic Equations.

A close look at past papers of CAT would make you realise that every year without fail between 60-85% of the test paper has been on Block I and Block V. This comes at a time when the qualifying score in quants has hovered around 25% to 30%. These two blocks alone account for almost double of what you need to get to qualify in the quants section of the exam, year after year. While CAT 2005 had around 19 questions out of 30, CAT 2006 had 18 out of 25 and CAT 2007 had 19 out of 25 from these blocks of chapters.

And hence, CAT 2008 should be no different. This gives us objective I in QA preparation.

Objective I: Thoroughly review all concepts and, more importantly, go through the maximum number of questions that you can go through in these blocks. Try to reach a point where you know practically every question and/or every logic that can be thrown up in a question from these blocks. Also, make sure you revise each and every question from these blocks. We are assuming here that most of you must have already done a lot of work on these chapters.

Solve 25 questions daily from these chapters combined, and review at least 40-50 questions that you have already solved from these chapters earlier. While reviewing, just try to recollect or think about the thought process required to solve the question. One good idea might be to collect the mock test papers of a few institutes and solve them for these chapters. In 30 days you can cover over 750 new questions and review over 1,200 questions — numbers that should be sufficient to put you in a confident state of mind for the D-Day.

Objective II: Create a solid back up plan. Whenever, the CAT has deviated from the model of the over 70% of the test coming out of the chapters mentioned above, the deviation has been mostly towards: A) Geometry and Mensuration B) Time Speed and Distance, and/or C) Permutations and Combinations and Probability These three areas are crucial also because of the fact that questions from these chapters have always been a constant presence in the CAT — check the CAT papers over the past 10 years and you would realize the truth of our statement. So, as a contingency plan, especially if you are already well-prepared on the main portions mentioned above. Focus on Geometry and Mensuration and Time Speed and Distance. If you feel comfortable with Permutations and Combinations and Probability then you could perhaps prepare that area too. But, try to do at least two of the three areas mentioned here for a superior contingency plan.

Objective III: Improve your calculations. This is another thing that can be significantly enhanced in the last month. Your focus should be on two digit calculations — additions, percentage calculations and ratio comparisons. In our next article, we will look at some short-term processes for developing your scores in language and data interpretation and reasoning skills.

‘Reduce the importance of CAT in your life’

IN THE LAST MONTH OF PREPARATION TIME, MAKING THE CAT THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN YOUR LIFE MIGHT BE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE. ARUN SHARMA TELLS YOU HOW KEEPING THE 'BIGGER' PICTURE IN SIGHT CAN HELP YOU GIVE THE EXAM YOUR BEST SHOT

AS you enter the last month of preparation time, there are a few key issues we would like you to address. Believe it or not, but you need to reduce the importance of the CAT in your life.

While this may seem ironical but you will have to do it if you want to give yourself the best chance of performing at the optimum on the day of the CAT. Making CAT the most important thing in your life might be counter-productive for you at this stage. The reason is not too difficult to understand — being the kind of exam it is, you would require to give yourself the maximum freedom of thought while writing the test — and this would not happen in case CAT is the most important thing in your life.

You do not want to take the exam with unnecessary pressure on you. So, the idea is that you need to reduce the pressure on yourself. Our only contention is that if you are free from unnecessarily negative thoughts, you might end up doing the best you can. Thus, reducing the importance of cracking the CAT at this stage of your preparations will ironically give you your best chance to bell the CAT.

So your obvious question would be: "How can I go about reducing the importance of the CAT at this stage?" A few suggestions for the same:

1. Create a back up plan for the year if you do not get through. One of the ways to reduce pressure on yourself is to give yourself a two to three year time frame for entering a B-school. Once you do so, you would realize you have at least three attempts at the exam and hence, the exam on November 16, 2008, need not be your only chance. However, if you have this kind of plan for yourself, then you need to actually have thought about how you are going to concretely use your time in the two to three year time frame. Create a plan of augmenting your bio-data by working full time/part-time, doing additional professional courses, learning a few languages and in general raising the level of 'education' in your life. Education beyond degrees — through the pursuit of knowledge is what we mean to say.
2. Realize for a fact that the IIMs are not the only way to succeed in your life. Even if you do an MBA from a second-level B-school you will still get enough opportunities to make it big. So, you need to realize that the IIMs do not hold a kind of exclusive key to success. Tell yourself that even if you do not do well in the exam, and are forced to join a relatively lower branded institution, you still would be excited about who you are and what you could achieve in your life. If you do not make it to the top through the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle, you still have the two legs through which you can reach the same destination. Remember, the long-term goal is to reach the top of the corporate ladder and as long as you can reach there, it does not matter what credentials you have picked up in the form of you management education.
3. Create a long-term plan. Another way to think about this situation is that in case you are forced to go to a second level B-school in the short-run, then you can still plan to go to a top international B-school after five to seven years of working. There is also an executive MBA from a top B-school. Once you have a professional profile on your bio data, you can always think of this option. This thinking is especially crucial for first timers. A lot of you out there have profiles that are not good enough to break

in the doors of the IIMs in your first attempt. So, in case you do not have that coveted IIT or university-topper tag of the finest Indian universities, then you can always build your profile over the next five to seven years. After that your profile would be equivalent to the best people around.

4. Reduce expectations of people around you. If you cannot, then stop taking these expectations to your heart. Start living your life for yourself. Many of aspirants we know are giving the exam in order to prove themselves in someone Else's eyes. This person could be your father, mother, brother, grandfather, uncle etc. Stop living for them and start living for yourself. One of the truths of life is that if you can start meeting your own expectations from yourself, all external expectations will also be met.

Other things that you need to do now:

I) Take your preparation to the stage of perfection — stop studying fresh portions, focus on concreting your learning

II) Create a concrete work strategy for the last month and follow it religiously

More on these issues in our next article in the series.

‘BANK YOUR CHEQUES’

ARUN SHARMA RECOMMENDS THAT THE FOCUS OF WORK FOR THE LAST FEW WEEKS OF CAT’S PREPARATION PROCESS SHOULD BE SIMPLE SO THAT YOU ARE ABLE TO BANK YOUR KNOWLEDGE CHEQUES ON THE D-DAY

IN the context of achieving success in any real life situation, a key concept is the ability to “Bank your cheques.” It is said that successful people are able to bank their cheques. What does this mean? Let us take an example. For instance, you work for a month and are paid a cheque of Rs 25,000 (and in some of your cases this might be your first earning), so you are very happy with the cheque but for some strange reason are unable to go to your bank and present it for the next six months. On the day you actually reach your bank with the cheque, your banker tells you that the cheque is outdated. You have not banked your cheque and hence have not got the worth of what you should have received.

Similarly, a common problem that most of you must be facing right now, while preparing for the D-day, must be the fact that most of the time in the tests that you take, there would be the problem of not being able to get the maximum value for the knowledge that you have. So in a way, when it comes to the examination time, for some strange reason you are unable to actually bank your cheque in this case you knowledge. You are not getting what you are worth.

Now this might not be crucial if the situation under which you are not “banking your cheque” is not going to have a long lasting effect. But, in a crucial event like the CAT exam, which has the potential to create an inflection point in your life — if your worth is a 98.9 percentile and you achieve only 90 percentile, you would be guilty if you don’t perform well.

Also, for a fact most of you would realise that on the big day, if you are able to actually derive the maximum value for the knowledge that you have, you would probably be getting a score, which would be much higher than what you are heading towards.

So the concentration of your work for the last month should be on ensuring that you reach a situation where you are able to bank your “knowledge” cheques on the D Day. So where does that leave you in terms of concrete action plans?

To understand what you need to do, it is important to understand why this is happening to you. The answer is simple and we have repeatedly mentioned it through our columns here. “You are not going to have full use of your mind on the day of the CAT,” so what will work for you will be your reflexes, and nothing else.

In other words, if you feel that there is a question that you are able to solve with a lot of effort by using over 80% of your mind’s resources, be pretty sure that you would not be able to do the same thing in the exam. Remember, you would be using less than 50% of your brain when you would be appearing for the exam. So obviously when you are taking the CAT, any question that requires you to use more than 50% of your mind is simply not going to be in your range. So your focus of work for the last few weeks of your preparation process should be simple.

Objective: Take your learning and knowledge to the level of unconscious competence or the level of reflex. It is only if you do so will you be able to “bank your knowledge cheques” in your CAT.

So our advise in this column would be to:

- Stop doing anything new
- Start revising what you have done and the unit of revision should not be the section or the chapter or the theory but it should be the question.

WORK ON YOUR ‘ABILITY TO PERFORM’

ARUN SHARMA SAYS IF CANDIDATES BELIEVE IN THEIR ABILITY TO PERFORM, THEY CAN MAKE THE FINAL STAGE OF CAT PREPARATION HIGHLY PRODUCTIVE

THE last couple of weeks before the CAT should be spent in finalizing your strategies and getting ready for whatever they can throw at you on the D-Day. In today's article we would like to concentrate on a few important issues that will help in putting finishing touches to your preparations.

Many students have a tendency to think that nothing can be done at this stage in terms of preparation. Ironically, the biggest danger, most of you face, is from within. Also most students, at this stage, think that they know about the percentile they will get. Our observation is that they have already defined the range of percentile they are going to land up with i.e. they already know the minimum and the maximum levels they are supposed to get. To put it very mildly this approach is ridiculous.

Consider a phone call we received from a CAT aspirant who was taking two different test series. She was very worried. In one of the two test series she was getting a percentile in the 80's, while in the other one, she was getting a percentile in the 50's. Her main concern was which of the two should she consider as her actual percentile. Our question to her was —what if there was another test series based on what the actual CAT was? And what if she was getting a percentile of around 99 in that. Which percentile would she count as the correct one then?

Once again we would like to get back to a major issue, which we had addressed, in these columns. The issue is — candidates should not take their mock percentiles seriously. We are reiterating this time and again because it is seen that by having preconceived notions about their scores, students unnecessarily court anxiety.

We have observed that ever since national mock tests have started, there has been absolutely no correlation between the actual CAT scores and the scores students achieve in their mocks.

Just as the performance of a cricket team depends a lot on the nature of the wicket, similarly the performance of an individual depends a lot on the design of the tests. In other words the actual CAT scores depend on the nature of questions in the actual CAT test. A coaching centre and a group of three-four people, who might be developing the tests for the coaching centres, do not define it.

It is important to remember: “The greatest battles can be and have been won if you have yourself on your side.” In case your belief system has already told you that you are not going to make it, no amount of external forces can help you win a war.

Hence what we are trying to tell you is that there is still a lot you can hope to do in the last few weeks before CAT. Even if your percentiles are stuck in the range of 50's you never know what you can achieve through improving your performance on the D-day.

We would like to remind you that even on the last day before the CAT there is something that you can do in order to change your fortunes in the exam.

Last minute preparation strategies:

Competitive examination preparation (and in fact preparing for any challenge you ever face in your

life) is about managing two dimensions of preparation:

Ability improvement: The focus in this is on improving your ability to do a certain thing in a better way

Performance improvement: This is more or less a state of mind issue. This essentially refers to the management of your belief systems and your state of mind, which emanate from your dominant belief system.

The fact that performance on the day is the only thing that counts is something that is instinctively understood by any sportsperson. That is why even top sportsmen and champion teams have people to help them perform better. Three lakh people, every year, try to work towards developing their abilities, nobody actually focuses on developing their ability to perform. I completely agree with the point of view that one cannot develop abilities in the last few days before CAT, but performance levels can be drastically enhanced in these last few weeks. Think about it! Focus on it! Find ways to change it.

PREPARE FOR SURPRISES IN THE CAT

ASSUMING THAT SOMETHING THAT HAS HAPPENED EARLIER IN THE CAT IS NOT GOING TO HAPPEN AGAIN HAS BEEN THE DOWNFALL OF MANY. ARUN SHARMA TELLS YOU HOW AVOIDING SUCH ASSUMPTIONS CAN EQUIP YOU TO HANDLE ANY AND EVERY SURPRISE CAT 2008 MAY THROW AT YOU

THE CAT exam is full of surprises and year-on-year lakhs of aspirants are shocked by the so-called unpredictability of the CAT. While there is no denying the fact that surprises do exist in the CAT, it is also a fact that most surprises happen due to the fact that aspirants prepare only on a two to three year framework while preparing for the CAT.

The most common refrain while preparing for CAT is — 'this used to happen earlier, does not happen any longer.' Any suggestions to the contrary are met with a roll of the eyes suggesting nothing but incredulity at the mere suggestion. The common thought goes that the CAT in 2008 is so different from the CAT in 1995 that how can you even think of comparing the two.

Well, we would agree and disagree with that opinion. Agree in the sense that we would accept the point that the CAT in 2008 is very different from the one around 1995. Disagree in the sense that there could be a lot of things that one could learn from the past CAT papers as one prepares for the CAT in 2008 and beyond.

Just to rest our case, we would like to point out to you the rather extraordinary fact that faced CAT 2006 aspirants — facts inference and judgments stumped over two lakh CAT aspirants and the last time this question type was used was in CAT 1991.

OUR ADVICE

In life (as in CAT) it is very important to understand that one should not become 'too wise.' The 'I know it all' attitude has been the death knell for the greatest of people. Be conscious in life to not make it yours. Stay foolish.

So what is the advice we want to pass on to you at this point in time? When there is a war, the better-prepared person is less likely to get shocked. So our message to you is to prepare yourself on a 10-15 year framework — do not take the myopic view of looking at what the CAT is in the two-three year framework. In other words, prepare on a wide angled framework.

So, what does it mean to prepare thus? Well, in the context of the last few days leading up to the CAT it means the following:

1) Question type wise: When you are looking at the kinds of questions the CAT has been throwing up, look right through from 1990 onwards to date. There have been numerous instances where not just question types but also question logics have been repeated in the CAT after 5-7-10 years. The FIJ example given above is just the most illustrative of this phenomenon.

2) Pattern wise: Do not get too straitjacketed with respect to what you expect in terms of the number of questions. In fact, do not pre-decide on the number of sections too. Be prepared for anything. Take for instance CAT 1999 where the three sections pattern was introduced for the first time, if memory serves us right. The previous two years had consisted of two sections only to be done over two hours. So, everyone had a clearly defined strategy- one hour with five minutes more or less per-section. When aspirants picked up the paper, it had three sections containing 55 questions each for the first time in its history. To top it all, the first section was VA/RC and it was a particularly lengthy section. People

could not make the simple decision of dividing the two hours into three time periods of 40 minutes each (which was the logical thing to do).

THE RESULT

The majority spent the planned one hour in the first section leaving only 60 minutes for the second and third section. Needless to say, by the time people finished the second section there was only 20-odd minutes left for the third (DI) section and there were 55 questions to be handled.

As a further punch, the exam setters had put 25 simple cake-walk questions of syllogisms between questions 141-165 (the last 25 questions) in all the question sets. Majority of the aspirants unfortunately did not reach these questions as they had already exhausted the time.

In this context a lot of students ask us about how many questions and sections to expect in CAT 2008.

OUR REPLY

Be prepared for a 50-question paper to a 150-question paper. Be prepared for a single section paper, to a multiple section paper. Preformulate your strategies for all paper patterns and there will be no shocks or surprises for you on the D-day.

THE D-DAY IS ALL THAT MATTERS

AS YOU ENTER THE EXAMINATION HALL FOR PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT TEST IN YOUR LIFE, ALL THAT IS GOING TO MATTER IS THE NEXT 150 MINUTES. BUT, THAT ALSO MEANS YOU HAVE AS GOOD A CHANCE TO PERFORM AS ANY ONE ELSE. ARUN SHARMA GIVES YOU THE LOW-DOWN

SO, we have reached a point of time where all your preparations and hard work dissolves into the final two-and-a-half hours. In a way anything that you have done till now — your preparations, your test scores — lose their significance. When the bell rings on the D-day, for a brief period of time an estimated two-and-a-half lakh aspirants would be equated for a brief period of time.

As you enter the examination hall for perhaps the most important test in your life, all that is going to matter is the next 150 minutes. So, what you need to remember is that on the D-day you are going to have as much of a chance as anybody else to perform. So, what are the few key things you need to remember as you approach the D-day? More importantly, what are the few things that you should focus to control in those 150 minutes?

Well looking at it from our perspective, the last week represents the most important phase of your preparations. We would like to make the following points:

1. Recognize that this is not the time for conventional preparations: Free yourself from your routine of solving questions, test papers etc. Perhaps, you should do no mental work on the last two three days before the examination. So, get rid of your books, your revision plans et al. Give yourself the freedom to enjoy the last few days. Get away from the pressure, the intensity. Get in touch with your inner-self and make your plans of where you would want to take your life, with or without cracking the CAT.

A point we have made before, but which gains immense importance in the last week prior to the CAT — Reduce the importance of the CAT in your life. Create an alternate plan of success, prove to yourself how you are going to ‘make it big’ irrespective of whether you go to an IIM or not. Ironically, achieving this state of mind could be the biggest favour you could do to your chances on November 16.

2. Recognize that the battle you are facing is against yourself: It’s a battle for the management of your mind. One of the greatest disservice you could do to yourself during the 150 minutes of the CAT is to stop focusing on your performance and start thinking about where your competition is heading to. Do not fall into this thinking trap. Instead, your main goal of managing your mind should be to ensure that your undiluted focus for 150 minutes is on what you can control.

At every point of the examination the only thing that you can control is the next question and its solution. Nothing else matters. The previous question and its experience does not, the previous section does not, the next question or the next section does not.

- What will matter in the CAT is what you are able to execute.
- What will matter in the CAT is whether you will be able to spend the appropriate time for the appropriate question.
- What will matter in the CAT is whether you are able to block out your negative emotions.
- What will ultimately matter in the CAT is going to be the percentage of time when you had control of

your mind.

For this purpose it is important to 'free your mind.' For 150 minutes on November 16 you will need to be insulated against the three things that imprison your mind — fear, doubt and disbelief.

3. Get into the no fear state and no doubt state: Fear and anxiety take over our minds when we are faced with a situation where we have something to lose. The moment external circumstances create a situation where an individual recognizes that he is in danger of losing out on something he/she has cherished, that is the point where anxiety and fear grip you. The moment that happens, one starts losing control on one's performance.

On a day like the CAT where there is so much at stake, such a thing is bound to happen to you. In fact, it is almost sure to happen to each and every aspirant on that day. What is going to be your critical test is how fast you can regain control of yourself when fear, doubt and anxiety grip you.

Throughout this series of articles we have maintained that the questions in the CAT are pretty easy. That has been the case for every CAT paper of the past decade and more. That is going to be true for CAT 2008 as well. Why the CAT becomes difficult is because these negative emotions we are talking about create lapses of reason. The most common reaction for every 50-60-70-80-90-99 percentiler after he/she comes out of the paper is 'Oh my gosh. How could I miss this logic?'

The answer is that you miss out on logic, thought processes and reactions when your state of mind is dominated by fear, doubt and anxiety. So, the battle on the D-day is going to be one of holding yourself straight. It's going to be a battle of managing your state of mind — one of controlling your senses and your intelligence.

Trust yourself and break barriers of disbelief. The aspirants who do these things the best are the ones who will get the coveted interview calls. All the Best!