

How do examinees' scores change when they retake the MCAT exam, and how do admissions officers use scores for applicants who test more than once?

MCAT examinees can test up to three times in one calendar year and four times across two calendar years. An examinee cannot take the exam more than seven times in their lifetime. As shown in Figure 4 on page 5, about 36% of individuals who took the MCAT exam in 2017, 2018, and 2019 were retesters.

To show the types of score gains obtained upon retesting, analyses were conducted to compare scores from examinees' very first attempt with their second attempt. These analyses include scores from examinees who tested for the first time in 2017, 2018, or 2019 and then retook the exam in that window. Figure 11 uses box-and-whisker plots (described earlier for Figure 7) to show the distributions of score gains (and losses) on examinees' second attempts at the exam, by their first-attempt scores.

The data show that retesters across a wide range of scores tend to obtain higher scores on their second exams. Figure 11 shows that the median gain was two to three score points for examinees who tested a second time and whose first-attempt scores were between 472 and 517. For examinees whose initial scores were between 518 and 528, the median gain was zero points. It is important to note, however, that there was considerable variation in the magnitude and direction of score changes, with some examinees posting increases or decreases greater than four points.

Figure 11. Changes in MCAT total scores between the first and second attempts of MCAT examinees from 2017 to 2019 who retested.

