CAT Preparation Strategy by Toppers

Lessons from 100 percentilers and 99+ scorers, 2016 to 2025
Plan smarter for CAT 2026

20
toppers featured

100+
mocks by some toppers

10
years of insights

Compiled from Shiksha's CAT topper interviews. Source: shiksha.com/mba/cat-exam-preparation

OVERVIEW

Why toppers' advice matters

Every year, over 2.5 lakh candidates appear for CAT and only about 30 land between the 99.98 and 100 percentile. Scoring that high takes hard work and smart work: long hours alone are not enough without a strategy that pays off in every phase of preparation. A plan should also fit your own capacity, since some learn quickly, some need more time on concepts, and not everyone has the same time to prepare.

Most toppers of the past five years **studied by themselves with guidance from mentors and lots of mock tests**. Ask them and they will say in unison: **practice as many mock tests as you can.**

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Six things toppers agree on

1
Mocks are the backbone
Toppers took anywhere from 35 to 110+ mocks and treated them as the core of preparation.

2
Analysis beats attempts
Keep an error log and fix repeated mistakes. Analysing a mock matters more than taking it.

3
Learn concepts before mocks
Finish the syllabus first, then ramp up mocks (Madhur Gupta, Riddhi Dugar).

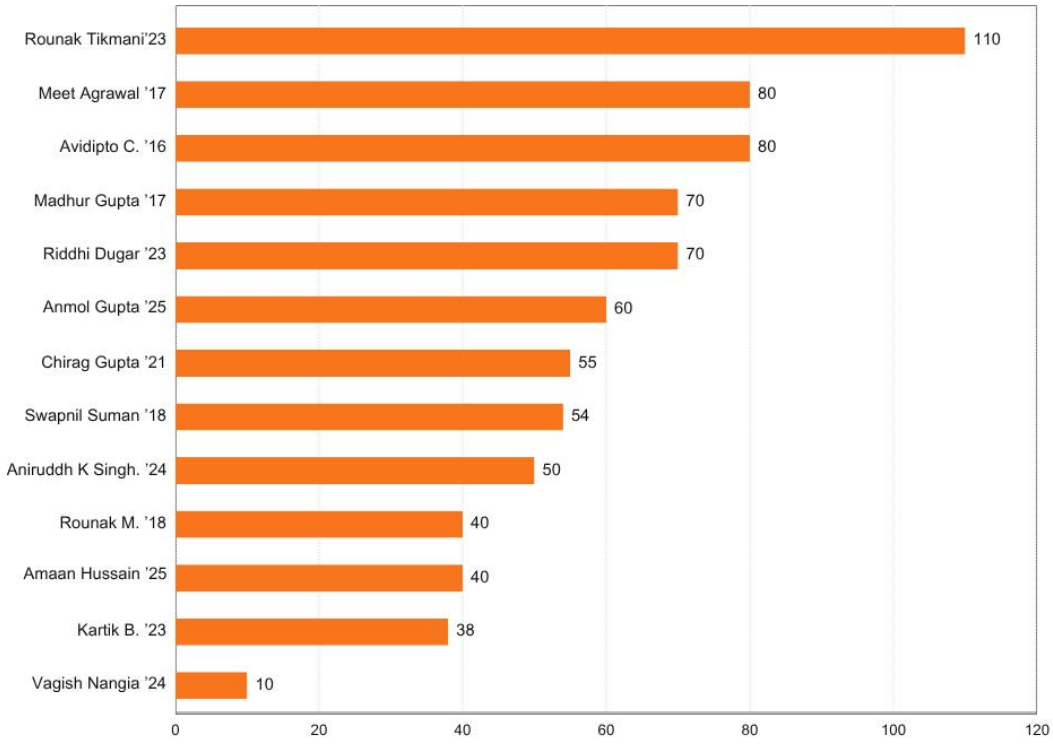
4
Pick questions smartly
Start with easy sets and questions; leave the hard ones for the end.

5
Fix your weakest section
Give extra time to your weak area (Anmol, Kshitiz, Akshay) but keep strengths sharp.

6
Stay calm on D-Day
Variety in mocks removes surprises, so you can keep your cool in the exam.

BY THE NUMBERS

How many mocks did toppers take?



Approximate counts as shared by toppers in their interviews (ranges shown at midpoint). Recent toppers below did not quote a total, but mocks were central to their prep.

Recent toppers (2024 and 2025) on mocks

Topper	How they used mocks	Interview
Anmol Gupta CAT 2025 | 99.96 percentile	Prep was mainly mocks and analysis. Analysed every mock, aiming to solve 3 RCs and all 8 VA questions.	Full interview >
Pranshav Shah CAT 2025 | 99.80 percentile	Primary focus on as many mocks as possible, plus analysis. Daily timed practice: 4 RCs, 4 DILR sets, 30-40 Quant questions.	Full interview >
Vagish Nangia CAT 2024 | 100 percentile	Short on time, so practised each section, then sectional and full-length mocks.	Full interview >
Sarthak Jaiswal CAT 2024 | 99.97 percentile	Mocks are very important for QA and VARC; for DILR, plain practice matters more than mocks.	Full interview >

SECTION-WISE PLAYBOOK

Distilled from the toppers' advice

VARC

- Read regularly: newspapers, editorials (The Hindu, Mint), fiction or topics you enjoy.
- Pick the easiest 2 of 4 RCs and aim to finish each in 7-8 minutes.
- Practise para jumbles, odd-one-out and summary questions; learn paragraph structure.

DILR

- Spend about 5 minutes to judge if a set is solvable; don't sink time into a stuck set.
- Read all sets early; start with DI and easier LR sets to clear sectional cutoffs.
- Treat sets like puzzles. Variety of practice makes patterns feel repetitive.

Quant

- Get basics and the logic behind formulas right first.
- Attempt easy questions first, then return to harder ones.
- Solve without relying on a calculator; speed comes from experience.

TOPPER JOURNEYS

Strategies year by year

Each card links to the topper's full interview on Shiksha. Tap **Read full interview** to open it.

AG

2025

Anmol Gupta

99.96 %ile

Mocks and analysis first, VARC being the weakest section

My preparation was mainly focused on mocks and analysis. For VARC, I read a lot of articles as this has always been my weakest section. I analysed every mock, aiming for 3 RCs and all 8 VA questions.

For DILR, my aim was to solve all 5 sets. I invested a maximum of 5 minutes to judge whether a set was solvable. In the actual exam I attempted all 5 sets in under 35 minutes.

Read full interview >

VN

2024

Vagish Nangia

100 %ile

Started July 2024 despite a packed 7th semester

I started considering CAT seriously in July 2024. I focused on understanding the exam, practising questions for each section, and doing sectional and full-length mocks.

In VARC the key is to read and attempt an entire comprehension within 7-8 minutes. For Verbal Ability, understanding paragraph structure is crucial for odd-one-outs and sentence placement.

Read full interview >

KB

2023

Kartik Bhageria

99.99 %ile

35-40 mocks; analysis was pivotal

In DILR persistence is key, but spending one more minute on a set can cost time you need elsewhere. Mocks teach you how to allot time to each set.

In Quant, attempt the easier questions first and leave the difficult ones. I attempted 35-40 mocks; analysing them played a pivotal role in refining my strategy.

Read full interview >

RA

2022

Risshi Agrawal

99.99 %ile

Smart section-wise starting order

In VARC, identify the 2 of 4 RCs that are easiest (about 24 min), then focus on VA. In DILR, start with the DI set and then pick 2 of the remaining 3 puzzles. In QA, filter questions by strength and attempt them first.

I read newspapers daily, preferring topics like sports and politics, and solved a variety of DILR puzzles with extra focus on LR.

Read full interview >

CG

2021

Chirag Gupta

100 %ile

Started March 2021; 50-60 mocks

For VARC, I read fiction mainly and even that helped a lot. For DILR, I focused on identifying set types and read every set in the first five minutes, starting with the easiest DI sets, then the easier LR sets. This ensures you clear sectional cutoffs.

In Quant I got my basics right first and did easy questions before harder ones. I took about 50-60 mocks. On exam day: stay calm and don't think too much about the result.

Read full interview >

KS

2020

Kshitiz Singhal

99.99 %ile

Syllabus first, then mocks; no coaching

I started by learning the CAT exam pattern and syllabus. Once the syllabus was complete, I began mocks. I did not enroll in coaching but bought study material and mock series from noted institutes.

VARC was my weak area. Seniors told me to work on fundamentals, so I reworked my approach and analysed mocks in detail. My scores started improving.

Read full interview >

RM

2019

Rishi Mittal

100 %ile

A non-reader who cracked VARC

People think you must read a lot to score in VARC. Even a non-reader can score; I haven't read a single novel. I was inconsistent at first, scoring anywhere from 18 to 62 out of 102, then worked on RC separately with a strategy for each question type.

For DILR I solved TIME and IMS material. The more mocks you give, the more sets you solve, and the easier DILR gets. Quant is experience based too.

Read full interview >

SS

2018

Swapnil Suman

100 %ile

Second attempt; 54 mocks

I started in August and took mocks of popular institutes: 3-4 on weekday evenings and 1-2 on Sundays, 54 in total. Analysing each mock and learning from each mistake was the game changer.

I treated DILR as puzzle solving. If one practises enough problems, most questions start to seem repetitive and easy to tackle.

Read full interview >

CG

2017

Chhavi Gupta

100 %ile

Full-time job, weekends only

I worked five days a week and found almost no time. I cut relaxing time at night and woke earlier for an extra hour of study. Weekends were solely for CAT.

From the beginning I gave a mock at least every other weekend and analysed it for improvement.

Read full interview >

AC

2016

Avidipto Chakraborty

100 %ile

Nearly 80 mocks with a 9-hour job

CAT is a random exam. Mocks familiarise you with easy, moderate, difficult, lengthy and vague scenarios. With enough of them, nothing will surprise you and you keep your cool.

Find people around you who are preparing for the exam, on social media or in your friend circle, to keep the motivation going.

Read full interview >

MORE TOPPER INTERVIEWS

Quick reads from CAT 2023 to 2025

Topper	Strategy snapshot	Interview
Harsh Khudania CAT 2025 | 99.93 percentile	My preparation strategy was to practice and nothing more. I analysed topics where I made mistakes and gave them extra hours. Last minute revisions are very important.	Full interview >
Mani Praneeth Chilukuri CAT 2024 | 100 percentile	Started a few weeks before the exam due to job commitments. Learned the format and syllabus via YouTube, then solved a few previous years' papers.	Full interview >
Vedant Chandewar CAT 2024 | 99.98 percentile	Began August 2024. Good at maths, so QA and DILR felt easier. Joined a coaching institute with daily practice questions and solved them diligently.	Full interview >
Riddhi Dugar CAT 2023 | 99.91 percentile	Finished the syllabus a few months before CAT. From July, focused entirely on mocks and sectional tests, about 70 in all, to build a D-Day strategy.	Full interview >
Rounak Tikmani CAT 2023 | 99.90 percentile	Started properly in May 2023. Built foundations, then mocks every day: around 110. Analysing mocks and fixing mistakes matters more than taking them.	Full interview >

KEEP GOING

Useful CAT 2026 resources

- Read: How to Prepare for CAT 2026 in 6 Months
- CAT 2025 toppers' list, interviews and more
- CAT 2024 toppers' list, interviews and more
- CAT exam pattern
- CAT syllabus
- CAT mock tests
- CAT previous year question papers
- CAT exam preparation guide

Predict your CAT admission calls

Check CAT cut-offs and predict calls from IIMs and non-IIMs. See fees, placements, eligibility and shortlist criteria for all CAT-accepting colleges.

Open College Predictor >