

SimCAT 1: The Experts' Take

TEST OVERVIEW

<u>Section</u>	<u>Cut-off</u>
Verbal Ability-Reading Comprehension	35
Data Interpretation-Logical Reasoning	20
Quantitative Ability	38
Overall	123

Following table shows the marks required to score different percentiles in the three sections as well as overall.

Percentile	Score Verbal	Score DI-LR	Score Quant	Overall Score
99%	57	39	65	141
95%	46	29	52	111
90%	39	23	45	94
80%	32	17	33	75
70%	27	13	24	60

This was the first SimCAT of the season. This SimCAT was meant more to make you aware of what it takes to take a full length test. For most of you, SimCAT-1 was the first full length CAT-type test under actual test conditions i.e. with a time constraint and all questions. So far if you are used to solving individual questions, you would have realized that taking a full length test under actual test conditions is a different experience altogether. Challenges seem manifold, the clock is ticking continuously and every second not spent on answering the questions seems to add to the pressure.

As happens in any test, some students performed well while some others could not perform as well as they had expected to perform. If your performance in SimCAT-1 was below your expectations because you were unable to handle these multiple tasks simultaneously, don't lose heart. This is just the beginning of your test-taking in a simulated environment. It is very much likely that you could not fathom all the challenges of taking a full length test if you have been solving individual questions so far. Remember that CAT is more than six months away. You will appear for many more full length tests and you will become more adept at managing these tasks well. So don't lose heart even if you could not perform well in SimCAT-1.

Overall analysis

We tried to map SimCAT-1 roughly similar in terms of structure and level of difficulty on CAT-2017. There was a significant difference in the level of difficulty of DI-LR section of the two slots of CAT-2017. Accordingly we matched the level of difficulty of the sets in the DI-LR section. Like in CAT-2017, the SimCAT-1 of 2018 was marked by easy to medium Reading comprehension questions, medium to difficult Verbal Ability questions, medium to difficult DI-LR section and easy to medium Quantitative Ability section.

In the following paragraphs, you will see the analysis of the individual sections.

Verbal Ability- Reading Comprehension

1. The section mimicked the 2017 CAT – with 24 questions in RC and 10 questions in VA. There were no Vocabulary or Grammar questions, like in the CAT of the past three years.
2. We kept the difficulty level of SimCAT 1 similar to that of 2017 CAT. Cat 2017 was held in slots and the difficulty level varied. The morning slot was easier than the afternoon slot. In SimCAT 1, we struck a balance between the two slots of the CAT.
3. The primary objective of SimCAT 1 VARC section was to help you gain exposure to what the CAT is really like - in look and feel, because , we are certain, that many of you are wondering what the actual CAT looks like. This exposure, early-on in your preparation will help you understand how to study and what exactly to study.
4. The 5 passages in RC, similar to CAT 2017, were drawn from various topics: on Randomness and Regression to the mean; Senescence; Cosmic Microwave Background; Music and the Brain; and Economic Populism. The passages had a mix of easy and medium difficulty questions. The first and the fourth passages, the ones on Randomness, and Music and the brain, and the questions set on them, were easy. The second and third were a mix of easy medium difficulty questions, and the fifth passage on Economic populism was difficult, and the questions were of medium difficulty.
5. If you have noticed this, and attempted questions accordingly, you are on the right track; as selection of passages is important in the CAT.
6. 17 out of 24 RC questions were easy, and 7 were of medium difficulty. There were no difficult RC questions.
7. The VA questions also followed exactly the CAT 2017 pattern. Out of the 10 questions 3 summary questions were MCQs and carried negative marks for incorrect response. Remaining 7 questions were TITA (type in the answer) questions and had no negative marks. The TITA questions were: 3 out-of context sentence, and 4 Jumbled Paragraphs.

8. Out of the 7 questions in VA only two were easy – Paragraph Jumbles at question number 34, and Out of context sentence at question 28.
9. Two questions were difficult: Question 25 (Summary) and Question 32 (Jumbled paragraph).
10. All other VA questions were of medium difficulty.
11. Overall, VA RC Section of SimCAT 1 was easy to medium. If seriously taken, you could attempt around 14 questions in RC and all 10 questions in VA. That means a total of 24 attempts.
12. With the most conservative estimate of accuracy (of 50 percent) we expect you to score about 35 marks to be in the race. Your performance also shows that the cut off in the VARC section in SimCAT1 is 35 marks.
13. However to be competitive, it is necessary to achieve at least 70 percent accuracy without compromising on the number of attempts. So we see that a score of 46 to 57 marks is in the 95 to 99 percentile. It is also not surprising to see a few exceptional scores close to 70, because the test wasn't difficult at all.

In the future SimCATs, we will take you through the entire gamut of Verbal Ability questions at various difficulty levels, and cover all the question-types in the CAT of at least the past two decades. So, go through the SimCATs diligently, and the actual CAT may hold no surprises for you.

Data Interpretation and Logical Reasoning

As stated earlier, this section was at comparable level of difficulty as compared to CAT-2017. The LR sets were slightly more challenging than the DI sets. Yet this section had its own share of doable sets, which must not have been left. For example, the DI set on the employees in Samsung and the number of boxes with Mr. Trump fell in this category. Similarly the LR set on the seating arrangement of professors was yet another doable set, which should not have been left.

The DI set on the entrance exam of National Institute of Management – Lucknow was rather a tricky set. Similarly the DI set on apples in an orchard was also not very straightforward. So was the LR set on 'Pelton Wheel'. Similarly the LR set on the movies in a multiplex in Bangalore was also challenging. The entire set hinged on one idea that certain two movies had to be played on consecutive days in all the screens. Students who could figure that out would have been able to solve the set quickly while those who could not figure that out would have struggled.

Ideal strategy in this section would have been to attempt the three doable sets first before worrying about other more challenging sets.

As you can see, the cut-off for this section is 20. That roughly translates to 10 questions attempted at 80% accuracy. In a section at this level of difficulty, even if you had attempted only three sets, it would have been sufficient to clear the sectional cut-off. If you had attempted one more set with 80% accuracy, that would have been sufficient to cross 95 percentile mark.

Quantitative Ability

The performance of students in QA section was slightly better than our expectation. We will throw more light on that in the learnings section in this experts' take later.

Majority of questions in this section were easy to medium level of difficulty. The questions 1, 2, 5, 8, 14, 16, 17, 22, 30 and 32 (total 10 questions) were rather straightforward and must not be left out. Another 10 questions (7, 9, 11, 12, 15, 19, 24, 25, 29 and 33) were time-consuming. You should have dealt with those questions only after solving the straightforward questions in the section. Out of these questions, Q. 15 and Q. 25 tested concepts at a higher level of difficulty. Only way you can solve such questions is to know the concepts. Otherwise it is safe to leave out such questions. Q.12 and Q. 29 could have been solved using the trick explained in the video analysis.

If you had attempted the 10 straightforward questions listed above with a high level of accuracy and solved 5 other questions except the ones that were time-consuming, you would have been in a much more comfortable position to clear the cut-off. So the key is to identify the easy questions you want to attempt before worrying about other challenging questions. We will discuss this aspect in more detail in the learnings.

The cut-off for this section was 38. That roughly translates into an attempt of 18 questions with 80% accuracy. As stated earlier, an attempt of the 10 straightforward questions identified above would have helped you cover more than half the distance required to clear the cut-off.

Selection of questions

In order to clear the cut-off for section 1 comfortably, about 16 questions could have been solved with 80% accuracy. To do the same for section 2, about 10 questions could have been solved with 80% accuracy. To do the same for section 3, about 18 questions could have been solved with 80% accuracy. In order to clear the overall cut-off, you would have to solve about 11 more questions with 80% accuracy. Given below are the questions you should have solved.

<u>Sec.</u>	<u>Must-Solve Questions*</u>	<u>Potential Score Improvers**</u>	<u>Total Qs</u>
VA-RC	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 15, 16, 19, 20	1, 2, 3, 9, 11, 12, 14, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 30, 32, 33	25
DI-LR	1, 2, 3, 4, 17, 18, 19, 20, 30	10, 21, 31	12
QA	2, 3, 5, 6, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 30, 32, 34	1, 8, 10, 26	23

* Questions that have been attempted by a majority of the top 10 %ile students, with an accuracy of at least 80%.

**Questions that have been attempted by a majority of the top 10 %ile students, with an accuracy of 50-80%.

LEARNINGS

Every SimCAT offers you some learnings. These learnings can help you focus your preparation in a better way so that you will be best prepared on the D-day and clear the cut-offs of top b-schools.

Learning 1: Don't let your performance in one section affect your performance in the following section

The experience in CAT-2015, CAT-2016 and CAT-2017 as well as in SimCATs was that the performance of students in QA section was affected by the memories of difficult DI-LR section. In CAT-2015 and the first slot of CAT-2017, it happened that the DI-LR sets were rather formidable and some of our good students who solved four sets incorrectly believed that they had performed poorly because they were able to solve 'only' four sets. When they started their QA section, they were under the impression that they had messed up and would be unable to clear the sectional cut-offs and as a result, almost 'gave up' on QA section. It turned out that solving 4 sets with 80% accuracy in those tough sections was enough to clear the sectional cut-offs of most decent institutes. Ironically such students cleared the sectional cut-off in DI-LR section but failed to clear the cut-off in QA section.

As you have experienced, DI-LR section in this SimCAT was also on a difficult side. In the past SimCATs, the performance of students in QA section had seen a significant drop if the preceding DI-LR section was tough. We are happy to note that this phenomenon was not observed in this SimCAT.

Remember that you have a sectional time-limit and once the time for the given section is over, there is nothing you can do to change your responses on that section. If that is the case, it would not make sense to worry about that and let it affect your performance on the following section. Do the best of what you have at hand and don't worry about something you cannot anyways change. Also remember that if a particular section was difficult for you, it was difficult for most other students and as a result, the cut-off in that section will most probably be low. In that case, even a lower absolute score will help you clear the cut-off.

Learning 2: Toppers not only solve questions differently but also solve different questions

Analysis of percent attempts on DI-LR and QA sections reveals an interesting pattern. Average attempt of all students in DI-LR and QA sections was at 34% and 41% respectively. These percentages stood at 49% and 66% respectively for top 10 percentilers in the respective sections. In general, the average attempt of top 10 percentilers was about 50% to 70% more than that of all students. This is consistent with the trend observed during last several years of SimCATs. However, a few questions were not attempted by as many top 10 percentilers. There were also a few questions that were attempted by fewer percentage of top 10 percentilers than all students. For example, last set in DI (Q.13 to 16) was attempted by about 19% of all students as well as top

10 percentilers. Similarly Q.15 in QA was actually attempted by fewer percent of top 10 percentilers than all students.

What does this indicate? This indicates that top 10 percentilers spotted that these questions were slightly painful to attempt so they did not spend too much time over those questions and moved to next questions. In fact, one important reason why students who scored in the top 10 percentiles were able to do so is that they avoided more painful questions and solved easier questions.

Remember that the clock is ticking while you are taking the test. The CAT is as much about the questions you avoid as it is about the questions you attempt. Remember that getting into a B-school of your choice is more important than getting a particular question right. If a particular question seems to take a long time, don't make it an ego issue by thinking 'why can't I solve this question?' Skip that question for the time being and come back to it later if time permits. You would be better-off utilizing the time for other straightforward questions.

You don't have to (or rather you should not) solve the questions in the order in which they appear. In order to maximize your score, it makes sense to solve all the easy and doable questions first irrespective of where they are located. Bag those marks, pluck the low hanging fruits first and then worry about other more difficult questions, if time permits.

So the important learning is: **Toppers not only solve questions differently but they also solve different questions.** Identifying the questions you want to attempt and leaving out the questions you think are time consuming will go a long way in boosting your score in the actual CAT.

If you did not apply this strategy in SimCAT-1, make sure you apply it from next SimCAT onwards. If you diligently apply this strategy, your score will definitely see a quantum jump.

SimCAT-1 is over. What next?

Now that the test is over, the most important requirement is to analyze the test. Solve all the questions independently without referring to the solutions. After the questions are solved, refer to the solutions. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Could you get the questions right on your own?
2. If it was right, was your method the shortest or did the solutions offer a better method to solve the question?
3. If it was wrong, why did you get it wrong? If you did not understand the question at all or could not figure out a method to solve the question, you definitely need to revisit all the related concepts. If you got it wrong because of a silly mistake, be more vigilant and don't repeat the same mistake the next time such a question appears. It is perfectly acceptable to make mistakes at this point of your preparation provided you learn why you got it wrong and do not make the same error in future.

At this time, when the actual CAT is about 6 months away, your priority should be on getting all the concepts right. Make sure that you solve all the BRMs and class sheets. Also remember that

no matter how many questions you solve, you will not reap any tangible benefits if you don't analyze each and every question. You should complete all the BRMs as quickly as you can and certainly not later than by July 31 2018 positively.

All the Best for SimCAT-2!

