



Exam Expertise

MRCS Part A

Opinion, advice and insight from the September 2018 Exam

The MRCS Part A examination (2018/3) took place on 11 September 2018 and is the first to have been set with just SBA (Single Best Answer) questions; EMQs (Extended Matching Questions) were **removed after the April 2018 exam**.

The results were released on 2 October 2018, with 46% of Pastest customers reporting that they had passed the exam, which is **9% higher than the overall pass rates** commonly reported by the surgical Royal Colleges (not yet disclosed for this exam).

**Hardest topics in
Sep 2018 Exam**

**Plastics
Anatomy
Embryology**

(According to Pastest users)

Pay close attention to patient info

Questions in the MRCS Part A exam often begin with a description of the patient including their gender, age and sometimes ethnicity. For example, 'A 41-year-old woman arrives in the Breast Clinic...' or 'A 28-year-old Afro-Caribbean man comes to the Emergency Department...'

As you'll be feeling under significant time pressure there will be a tendency to gloss over such detail; however, they could be critical to your diagnosis so don't overlook them.

Answer LOTS of practice questions!

Back in 2015 we conducted a **unique piece of research** on the revision behaviour of MRCS Part A candidates which showed that while practice didn't quite make perfect, it did significantly increase the likelihood of a pass.

Fast forward to 2018 and this conclusion still rings true! The average number of questions answered by Pastest customers who passed the MRCS Part A September 2018 exam was close to 4,000 - a volume made all the more possible by the heavy use of our mobile app which enables junior doctors to answer questions offline when commuting to work or on a break in between shifts.

Indeed, our **successful customers averaged 1641 questions answered on the app** alone!

Average Qs
answered by
**successful
candidates**

3,856

Negative questions DO appear

Negatively-phrased questions - e.g. 'what is the LEAST likely diagnosis' - can crop up in the MRCS Part A exam, albeit infrequently. This is despite such questions being deemed poor practice in undergraduate medical exams.



Again, there is a need, therefore, to read the question very carefully and right to the end, so you don't unwittingly opt for the 'likely' rather than 'least likely' diagnosis.

“I didn't pay much attention to **negative questions until I saw some in the Pastest bank - and then similar questions appeared in the exam!”**

Prepare for a marathon, not a sprint

The MRCS Part A exam is five hours long, comprising a three-hour Applied Basic Sciences paper and a two-hour Principles of Surgery in General paper. That's 300 questions to answer. All on the same day.

If you're going to be successful you'll need to pace yourself and consistently hit the required rate of one question per minute (candidates can't leave in the first 90 minutes of the Applied Basic Sciences paper or the first 60 minutes of the Principles of Surgery in General paper, anyway, so there's no rush!).

Most frequently searched for terms in MyPastest

Thyroid



Bladder



Anatomy



The best way to do this is to work through practice papers (such as the 'Past Papers' in Pastest's resource) under timed conditions as the exam approaches. This will get you tuned into the timings you need to hit in order to answer all the questions the exam throws at you (correctly of course!).

Practise questions of various lengths

Although the majority of MRCS Part A questions are around two to four lines in length, particularly in the Applied Basic Sciences paper, questions will appear with no vignette at all.

Additionally, questions that include data can be quite overwhelming particularly those featuring blood results, as one candidate remembers: **“I vividly remember this huge table of blood results with thick, black lines. It was massive, a real data overload and a struggle to make sense of!”**

Average mark of Pastest users who answered **3,000+ Qs**



“I failed the exam in April [as] I didn't get through anywhere near **enough practice Qs, something I remedied this time around.”**

Summary

- Make the most of your one minute and read each question carefully from start to finish. This way, you won't miss any patient clues or negative phrasing
- Try to re-energise yourself during lunch as fatigue will set in during the Principles of Surgery in General paper
- Get through a high volume of practice questions, aiming for that magic 4,000 mark!
- Familiarise yourself with large tables of data, particularly those containing blood results!

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Formed in 1972, Pastest is a global provider of revision materials for undergraduate and postgraduate medical exams.