



THE HONEST PREPARATION GUIDE

# The UCAT Playbook

How to prepare smarter, avoid the mistakes I made, and perform under time pressure.

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Independent student guide based on official UCAT Consortium information, publicly available advice from high-scoring candidates, and personal experience. Not written or endorsed by doctors, tutors, universities or the UCAT Consortium. Test format, timings and statistics are current as at August 2026 — always confirm details on [ucat.ac.uk](https://ucat.ac.uk) before you sit the test.

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**How to read this guide.** Every page answers one of three questions: *what do I need to know*, *what should I do*, or *what mistake should I avoid*. Anything that didn't answer one of those was cut.

Where something comes from the UCAT Consortium — format, timings, scoring, statistics — it is stated as fact and sourced on page 28. Where something is a strategy I found useful, it is presented as a strategy to test, not a rule that works for everyone.

## 05 | QUANTITATIVE REASONING

## The Calculator And Speed

This is the most immediately actionable page in the guide. The on-screen calculator is slow, basic and unfamiliar — and almost nobody practises using it until the week of the test.

### What the official calculator actually is

- A **basic** calculator, available in Decision Making and Quantitative Reasoning only. It cannot perform scientific functions.
- It opens in a **separate window**. If you click elsewhere on the screen or use a keyboard shortcut, it goes inactive — you have to click back on it before it accepts input again. This catches people out constantly.
- If you're typing numbers on the keypad, **Number Lock must be on**. Check it at the start of the section, not halfway through a calculation.

### Interface shortcuts worth knowing

| Shortcut                       | What it does                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Alt + underlined letter</b> | Triggers that on-screen button. Where a letter is underlined in the interface, it has a shortcut — e.g. <b>Alt + N</b> for Next. |
| <b>Ctrl + /</b>                | Zoom in.                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Ctrl + -</b>                | Zoom out.                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Ctrl + 0</b>                | Reset zoom to 100%.                                                                                                              |

Source: UCAT Consortium test tools guidance. The official Tour Tutorial is the definitive reference for the live interface — check it before test day in case anything has changed for your test year.

### The Speed Vault

Conversions you should recognise instantly, without the calculator:

|                     |                       |                       |                       |
|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>50%</b><br>= 1/2 | <b>25%</b><br>= 1/4   | <b>20%</b><br>= 1/5   | <b>10%</b><br>= 1/10  |
| <b>75%</b><br>= 3/4 | <b>12.5%</b><br>= 1/8 | <b>33.3%</b><br>≈ 1/3 | <b>66.7%</b><br>≈ 2/3 |

**Use multipliers, not two-step sums.** For "a 15% increase", multiply by 1.15 rather than finding 15% and adding it. For "a 20% decrease", multiply by 0.8. One keystroke sequence instead of three, and one fewer place to make an error. Over 36 questions this is worth real time.

## 06 | TIMING, MOCKS &amp; ANALYSIS

## The Error Log

One row per mistake. Five columns. This is the tool I most wish I'd had — it takes about forty seconds per question and it is the mechanism that turns the improvement loop from an idea into a habit.

| Q  | Section | Why I got it wrong                          | Correct approach                                   | Action                                   |
|----|---------|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 14 | VR      | Misread "except" in the question stem       | Underline the actual ask before reading options    | 10-question stem-reading drill           |
| 8  | QR      | Slow percentage-change calculation          | Use the multiplier ( $\times 1.15$ ) not two steps | Mental maths, 5 min daily                |
| 22 | DM      | Overcomplicated a simple set problem        | Draw the Venn diagram immediately                  | 15 targeted Venn questions               |
| 31 | VR      | Used outside knowledge, not the passage     | Locate the proving sentence every time             | Underline-the-evidence exercise          |
| 6  | SJT     | Chose the option that avoided confrontation | Address directly and respectfully first            | Re-read GMC guidance on raising concerns |

Example only — fictional entries, shown to illustrate the format.

### Three rules that make it work

- **"Why" must be specific enough to act on.** "Careless" is not an entry. "Read the first option and stopped comparing" is an entry, because you can do something about it tomorrow.
- **Every row needs an action.** A log without actions is a diary of failures — demoralising and useless. The action column is the entire point.
- **Re-read it before every mock.** Five minutes scanning your own log immediately before a mock is the cheapest score improvement available. You will catch yourself about to repeat something on the list.

**Look for the repeat offenders.** After a few weeks, one or two reasons will appear far more often than the rest. Those two lines are, in practice, your UCAT score. Everything else is noise around them.