

Planning & preparation

A practical CAT roadmap for building habits, choosing what to study next, and turning mocks into measurable improvement.

Who this is for

First-time aspirants, repeat test-takers, and students who have taken several mocks but remain unsure what to study next.

What this guide helps you do

- Prepare for VARC, DILR and QA as different skills.
- Establish an early baseline and diagnose more than your score.
- Build a weekly routine with learning, practice, timed work and review.
- Turn repeated errors into specific actions.

The core idea: improve understanding, question selection and execution under time pressure together. The largest daily question count is not the aim.

The three sections in the RCMB mocks

Section	Primary demand	Planning focus
VARC	Reading and verbal reasoning	Comprehension, inference, option elimination
DILR	Data and logic	Set selection, representation, case handling
QA	Quantitative reasoning	Concepts, modelling, checking

These RCMB mocks use 40 minutes per section. Their format is a practice setting; consult the current official CAT instructions for actual timing, question types and scoring.

A mock score tells you what happened. Your review explains what to work on next.

Use the separate VARC, DILR and QA guides for section methods and worked practice. Guide 05 covers mock scoring and review in detail.

1. Start with a baseline

An early mock can show your starting point. If you are completely new to the exam, first learn what the three sections ask you to do, then take the baseline.

Attempt and record

Take RCMB Mock 01 under its stated time limits. Use rough paper and a response sheet. Keep the solutions closed. Record guesses, changed answers and questions you skipped or marked for return.

Record	What it tells you
Attempts and correct answers	Shows coverage and accuracy together.
Wrong MCQs and wrong typed answers	Separates format and marking effects.
Time and abandoned work	Shows where decisions consumed time.
Guessed correct answers	Reveals methods you cannot yet repeat.
Skipped questions	Tests whether skipping was a sound choice.

Retry before reading solutions

Retry wrong and skipped questions without a timer. If you can solve one calmly, investigate selection, execution or time pressure. If you still cannot solve it, investigate the concept or your interpretation of the prompt.

Name the cause

Cause	What happened	Next action
Concept	Did not know the idea	Study it; solve varied basics.
Interpretation	Misread passage or task	Restate the exact question.
Representation	No useful table or equation	Rebuild the setup.
Execution	Method right, step wrong	Check the risky step.
Selection / timing	Spent time without progress	Rehearse a stopping decision.

One question can have more than one cause. Choose the cause that would most change your next attempt.

2. Know what to prepare

Divide each section into skills and practise the one that is actually weak.

VARC: reading and decision-making

Skill	Practice	Evidence of progress
Comprehension	Main claim, purpose, tone, inference	Can explain textual support.
Elimination	Scope, extremes, contradiction	Can reject the closest wrong option.
Verbal ability	Ordering and summaries	Can explain the logical link or central claim.

DILR: selection and structure

Skill	Practice	Evidence of progress
Set selection	Find a useful first deduction	Leaves a poor set before it consumes the section.
Representation	Tables, grids, cases, variables	Builds reusable working.
Deduction	Sequencing and constraints	Can trace each claim to a fact or valid case.
Data handling	Ratios and comparisons	Uses the correct denominator and unit.

QA: concepts and application

Area	Preparation	Practice goal
Arithmetic	Percentages, ratios, rates, averages	Names the base and units.
Algebra	Equations, inequalities, sequences	Translates wording into constraints.
Geometry	Angles, shapes, area	Draws and labels a useful figure.
Number properties	Factors, remainders, divisibility	Uses properties before brute force.

A topic is not complete because you watched a lesson. Check whether you can solve representative questions, explain the method and use it under time pressure.

Topic lists are planning aids, not an official CAT syllabus. Prioritise using your error log and the latest official exam information.

3. Build your week

Use a cycle of Learn → Practise → Time → Review. Change the hours to suit your schedule while keeping all four activities.

A practical seven-day cycle

Day	Main work	Output
1	One concept or method	Two explained examples and a short note.
2	Untimed practice	Clean working, not just answer letters.
3	Short timed set	Attempts, accuracy and selection decisions.
4	Review	Reasons for wrong, guessed and slow answers.
5	Repair a repeated error	Fresh questions on that exact skill.
6	Mixed practice	Choose methods without topic labels.
7	Sectional or mock + review	Update next week's priorities.

If you have about two hours

A workable split is 40 minutes learning, 45 minutes practice, 30 minutes review and 5 minutes choosing the next priority. Some days should instead be reserved for the full 120-minute mock and a separate review block.

One observable target per section

VARC: point to passage evidence before locking an RC answer.

DILR: choose a representation before calculating.

QA: write the variable, unit and percentage base before solving.

Replace “improve QA” with an action you can see: “State the base before every successive-percentage calculation this week.”

More available hours can support another section or deeper review. Adding question volume alone does not establish progress.

4. Use mocks to learn

A mock shows what happens when knowledge meets a timer. Preserve the decisions you made, then examine them.

The four-stage cycle

Stage	Action	Watch for
Attempt	Use the stated exam conditions	Pauses or mid-test solution checks.
Score	Record section marks and attempts	Judging preparation by total marks alone.
Retry	Re-solve wrong, skipped, guessed, slow	Reading the key too soon.
Diagnose	Name causes and choose actions	Random extra practice.

Worked planning example

Suppose you answered 18 of 24 VARC questions correctly. If you attempted all 24, accuracy was $18/24 = 75\%$. If you attempted only 20, accuracy was $18/20 = 90\%$, while you answered 75% of the section correctly. Record attempts so these measures do not get confused.

Suppose three correct answers were guesses, two misses came from unsupported inference, and one from extreme wording. First review those six questions. Find the exact passage evidence or qualifier that changes each answer. Then practise a fresh passage using that check.

Your top three after each mock

1. Largest repeated error and the questions showing it.
2. Biggest selection or timing issue and the moment it occurred.
3. One promising skill to strengthen during the next week.

Question → What happened? → Why? → What will I do differently? → When will I retry?

A correct guess and a slow correct answer also deserve review; their method may fail in the next timed attempt.

5. Keep an error log you can use

Make each entry specific enough to change your next attempt. Use the space below for four consequential questions, not every routine slip.

Question / result	Cause and evidence	Next action / retry date
-----	----- -----	----- -----
-----	----- -----	----- -----
-----	----- -----	----- -----
-----	----- -----	----- -----

Write the failure precisely

Weak: "I am bad at arithmetic." Useful: "I used the original value as the base for the second percentage change. I will solve five varied questions and write the base before each calculation."

Five signals to review each week

Accuracy: are repeated errors declining?

Selection: are you leaving low-value questions earlier?

Pace: are familiar questions faster without losing accuracy?

Fresh retry: can you reproduce a method after a gap?

Explanation: can you explain your reasoning without remembering an option?

At week's end, use the log to choose the next target. Do not copy every solution into the log; capture the decisive mistake and repair action.

6. Your preparation roadmap

The balance between concept work, timed practice and mocks changes as your methods become more reliable.

Stage	Objective	Main work
Foundation	Understand key ideas and question types	Concepts, reading and easy practice.
Skill building	Make methods repeatable	Topic work, DILR sets, RC and verbal drills.
Timed practice	Make decisions under pressure	Sectionals, mixed sets and review.
Mock phase	Improve selection and accuracy	Full mocks, analysis and targeted repair.
Final stretch	Stabilise useful habits	Revision, error log and familiar methods.

When to take full mocks

Take a baseline early enough to guide study. Increase mock use when you can benefit from timed decisions. Keep enough time to analyse each attempt; one deeply reviewed mock is more useful than a stack of unreviewed scores.

When to move on from a topic

You do not need perfect mastery first. Move forward when you can solve representative questions, explain the standard method and recognise when it applies. Return if the same error appears again.

When to revise

Use your own marked questions and error log. Retry old problems after a gap and explain the setup from scratch. Recognising a solution on sight is weaker evidence than reconstructing it.

CAT strategy is personal. Two students can earn the same raw score with different attempt patterns. Use your accuracy, selection and time record to find what works for you.

This is a planning sequence, not a promised score path or an official schedule.

7. Printable planning sheet

Use this after a mock or at the start of a study week. Leave the original response sheet intact.

My current baseline

Section	Attempts	Correct	Wrong MCQ	Wrong typed	Skipped
VARC	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
DILR	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
QA	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Score = $3 \times \text{correct} - \text{wrong MCQs}$ (for the RCMB mocks). Accuracy = $\text{correct} \div \text{attempts} \times 100$. If attempts = 0, write N/A.

My diagnosis

Strongest section and evidence: -----

Most repeated error: -----

One selection or timing issue: -----

One strength to protect: -----

My next seven days

Section	One observable target	Practice and how I will check it
VARC	-----	----- -----
DILR	-----	----- -----
QA	-----	----- -----

Before / after each study block

Before: What exact skill am I practising? Am I learning or testing it? What will I produce?

After: Can I explain the method without the solution? What mistake repeated? What should I retry after a gap?

Plan from evidence. Practise with purpose. Review honestly. Repeat.

Student-reviewed edition of the RCMB planning guide. Independently created practice material; not an official CAT/IIM publication or endorsement. Check current instructions at iimcat.ac.in. Faculty review remains recommended before public release.