



IIM CALLING: Your 2026 Roadmap to India's Top B-Schools

CAT preparation often starts with talk of cut-offs and strategy, but what often shapes outcomes is the slower work that builds judgement, consistency, and command over pressure. Having a clearer understanding of what is actually assessed, right at the start of the year, directs the strategy well before test day.

What CAT really tests when the clock starts ticking

Nikhil Abhishek explores how CAT scores improve when you pick questions wisely, structure thoughts clearly, and absorb feedback

EVERY January, CAT aspirants begin with a sense of urgency. New books arrive, past papers are downloaded, and students dive straight into problem solving. Questions and sets pile up fast, and the rhythm scratches the itch of momentum. Mock tests appear within days, and scores begin to shape mood. But the risk with this approach is that aspirants end up preparing for the exam they think CAT is, rather than the exam it turns into once the clock starts. They work harder, yet their performance stays stubbornly inconsistent because the exam is filtering for a deeper skill than most realise, something much more fundamental.

CAT tests choices, not techniques: how well a student can judge what to attempt and what to avoid, how quickly they can recognise when they are heading in the wrong direction, and how calmly they can realign under pressure. This skill comes from reading situations accurately and responding without panic. It also includes the discipline to drop a plan midstream and restart neatly. The aim is consistency under a

relentless stopwatch.

Prof Vasanth Kamath V P, Associate Dean—Academics, at T A Pai Management Institute (TAPMI), sees this pattern every year. “Many aspirants believe CAT is a test of speed or how many questions they can attempt,” he says. Strong profiles begin to falter when students refuse to let go of difficult questions. “Candidates with slightly lower ability but better judgement, who identify their strengths early, skip wisely, and manage time calmly tend to do far better. This ability to make rational choices under stress is exactly what we look for in future managers,” he reveals.

Understanding this changes how aspirants should approach the year. Instead of starting with speed or volume, the first step is to build behaviours that support good judgement. These behaviours develop slowly, but they influence how a student reads a passage and how they respond when a section goes off plan. Preparation becomes training to recognise patterns and stay stable under constraints.

The same skills carry into the post-CAT stages, where clarity and structure matter more than fluency. Prof Kamath draws that line sharply. “Good communication is about clarity and coherence, and not vocabulary or fluency,” he says. Candidates who organise their answers and support them with a



Compared to academically strong candidates, those with slightly lower ability but better judgement, who identify their strengths early, skip wisely, and manage time calmly, tend to do far better — Prof Vasanth Kamath V P

grounded example stand out. “Panels are far more impressed by a candidate who pauses, listens carefully, and responds in a clear, organised manner even if the language is simple,” he explains.

According to Omar Chihane, Global General Manager, TOEFL, academic English proficiency grows through daily exposure. “Extended reading builds stamina and the ability to follow arguments. Listening to lectures or news, using captions where possible, strengthens real-time interpretation and supports writing,” he says, adding that an enhanced update to the TOEFL iBT reflects this shift by measuring integrated skills linked to academic readiness and real academic engagement, in alignment with the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages).

One habit that compounds early is reading with summarisation. “Candidates who read

editorials and then summarise them in a few lines learn to identify core arguments quickly,” Prof Kamath says. Over time, they get faster at presenting a balanced view in under a minute, which directly strengthens WAT (Written Ability Test) responses and PI answers.

Another differentiator is feedback. Many take mocks and analyse errors, but progress depends on what they do next. Prof Kamath has seen students with similar work ethic diverge simply because one adjusted method while the other defended old habits. “Improvement comes from reflection and adaptability, not effort alone,” he says.

With CAT 2026 roughly ten months away, there is time to train judgement early so that when the exam arrives, choices become sharper, and performance becomes more stable. That is where strong CAT attempts come from, and that is where the year ahead should begin.

SPOTLIGHT! IIM UDAIPUR

PLACEMENTS, CAMPUS LIFE, AND MORE

Placement trends

IN its most recent placement season, IIM Udaipur recorded strong outcomes across its flagship MBA and one-year specialised programmes. As per the institute’s published reports, the highest domestic package for the MBA cohort touched the upper ₹40 lakh range, while the average was in the high-teens to ₹20 lakh bracket. Over 100 recruiting organisations participated, spanning consulting, fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), financial institutions, and technology and product firms. Recruiters adopted more rigorous evaluation, emphasising knowledge, skills, and abilities, and students prepared through mock interviews, case discussions, and functional assessments.



Initiatives and collaborations

Recent developments include Samridhhi, a 12-week incubation programme focused on women-led enterprises, with a Startup Track and an Entrepreneur-in-Residence Track. The institute has also taken up campus expansion through a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) under the Design-Build-Finance-Operate-Transfer (DBFOT) model, including additional hostel rooms and new academic facilities. On the policy and research side, it signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) to serve as knowledge partner for a data innovation initiative, and a Statement of Intent with NITI Aayog’s Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office.

Alumni snapshot



ROHIT JAISWAL
(2012–14): Partner, Lagrange Point; Co-founder, Bombay Shaving Company



DEEWAKAR GUPTA
(2013–15): Technical Director, KPMG



SATABDI MAZUMDER
(2012–14): Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer; Deputy Development Commissioner, Bokaro



VIKRAMADITYA GUHA
(2011–13): Director, Global Corporate Strategy, Wipro

What do students like about studying here?



AMRUTA PATIL
BTech (Electrical and Electronics Engineering)

“The balance between academic intensity and a strong sense of community. Classes are engaging, professors encourage open discussions, and peers genuinely help each other.”



ADITYA PANWAR
BTech (Computer Science Engineering)

“Learning extends far beyond the classroom. Student-led committees and the Council of Student Affairs build leadership and interpersonal skills, and professors are approachable mentors.”

CAT 2026

Dates, pattern, and cut-offs at a glance

TIMELINE

- Registration: August 2026
- Exam: late November 2026
- Results: early 2027

TEST FORMAT

- Computer-based test
- Duration: 120 minutes

Sections

- VARC (verbal ability, reading comprehension)
- DILR (data interpretation, logical reasoning)
- QA (quantitative aptitude)

Total questions: 66

VARC: 24 | DILR: 20 | QA: 22

TARGET CUT-OFFS (GENERAL CATEGORY, TOP IIM SHORTLIST RANGE)

Overall

98 to 100 percentile

Sectionals

80 to 90 percentile

PRO TIP!

Past papers from iimcat.ac.in build stamina

From shortlist to seat: The admission timeline

IIM admissions move through multiple stages after the CAT, where profiles and round performance affect the composite score

STAGE 1:

CAT SCORE

CAT forms the base for shortlisting, along with profile factors in many cases

STAGE 2: SHORTLIST

Shortlisting is based on CAT performance and profile signals, including academics, work experience, and diversity, and sometimes an AWT (Analytical Writing Test)

STAGE 3: GD

Group discussions are part of the process for some institutes and formats

STAGE 4: PI

Personal interviews test clarity, communication, goals, and domain knowledge

STAGE 5:

SOP / PROFILE

The statement of purpose and overall profile are evaluated as part of the final composite assessment

HOW THE FINAL DECISION IS MADE

Final selection is based on a composite score, where **CAT carries 40%–60% weight, and WAT/PI contributes 20%–48%**

TIMELINE NOTE

Final offers typically roll out by May 2027

The 6-Month Mastery Plan

A strong CAT performance is rarely built on last-minute intensity. It comes from treating preparation like a system — easing into concepts early, scaling up practice at the right time, and using mocks to tighten accuracy and strategy. If you want a phase-wise plan that outlines how aspirants can structure the next six months for steady, compounding progress, look no further.

Months 1–2: foundations

Master core concepts across QA (arithmetic, algebra, geometry), VARC (grammar, reading comprehension), and DILR (puzzles, charts). Spend 2 hours

Notes!

Commerce aspirants can prioritise QA early, and use forums for doubts and free resources like past CAT papers

daily on weak areas, solve 50 topic questions, and build RC fluency through newspaper reading. Move ahead after reaching 80% accuracy

Months 3–4: intensive practice

Add sectional mocks weekly per section, along with 100 advanced questions per topic. Build speed to under 2 minutes per question using error logs focused on pain points such as inequalities or arrangements.

Continue 30–45 minutes of daily reading and LR drills

Months 5–6: mocks and mastery

Increase to 2–3 full mocks per week, targeting 25–30 total. Analyse each mock for 4–6 hours to refine strategies. Revise high-yield topics such as algebra, RC, and puzzles, along with past papers and a formula notebook. Target 85%+ accuracy and 99+ percentiles under timed conditions

Daily rhythm

1 hour QA/DILR, 1 hour VARC, 30 minutes review/reading

Weekly rhythm

1–2 mocks with deep analysis, plus one rest day to prevent burnout

PROFILE CONSIDERATIONS TO NOTE

● IIM shortlisting goes beyond scores and considers **academic background, work experience, and diversity factors**

● Several IIMs aim for **academic and gender diversity**, which can influence shortlisting outcomes

● A strong profile can complement CAT performance during later admission stages

What this means for aspirants

Meeting the eligibility criteria is only the first filter. While CAT scores remain central, IIM admissions typically evaluate candidates across multiple dimensions, making profile-building and clarity of goals relevant alongside exam preparation.

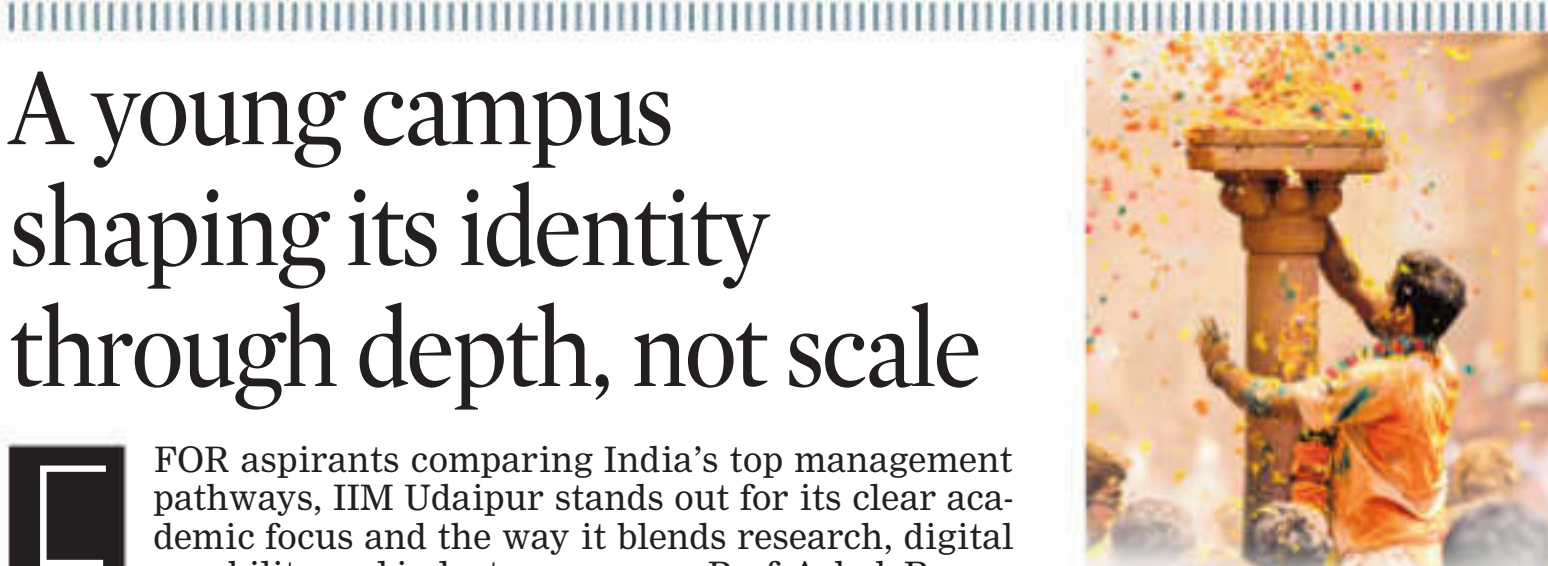
DO YOU QUALIFY?

Eligibility for CAT and IIM admissions is straight forward, but easy to overlook in the rush to start preparing. Here's a clear checklist to help you confirm your fit.



ELIGIBILITY CHECKLIST

- A **Bachelor's degree** from a recognised university
- **Minimum 50% aggregate marks** (45% for reserved categories)
- **Final-year students** are eligible to apply provisionally
- **Professional qualifications** such as CA, CS, or ICWA are accepted with equivalent scores
- **No age limit** specified for CAT or IIM admissions
- **Work experience is not mandatory**; fresh graduates are eligible



What's fun on campus?

● **Best canteen dish:** Aloo paratha from Megha Foods

● **Informal tradition:** Celebrating festivals before or after the date so everyone can be present

● **Campus lingo:** “globe” or “globing”, which means talking confidently without full clarity

● **Best time on campus:** August to December, with rains, winter, and festival season

● **Hangout spot:** The D2 area with cafés and shops

● **Most Instagram-worthy spot:** Above the mess stairs, with Aravallis on one side

● **Most competitive space:** Elected committees with multi-round selections

PROF ASHOK BANERJEE,
DIRECTOR OF IIM UDAIPUR

