



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" — Prof Vasanth Kamath V P

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.

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

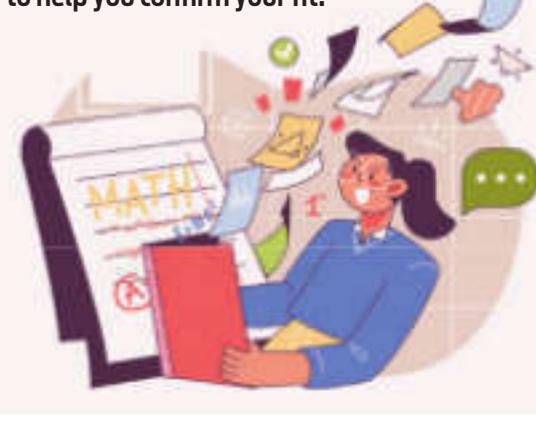
80 to 90 percentile

PRO TIP!

Past papers from iimcat.ac.in build stamina

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

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

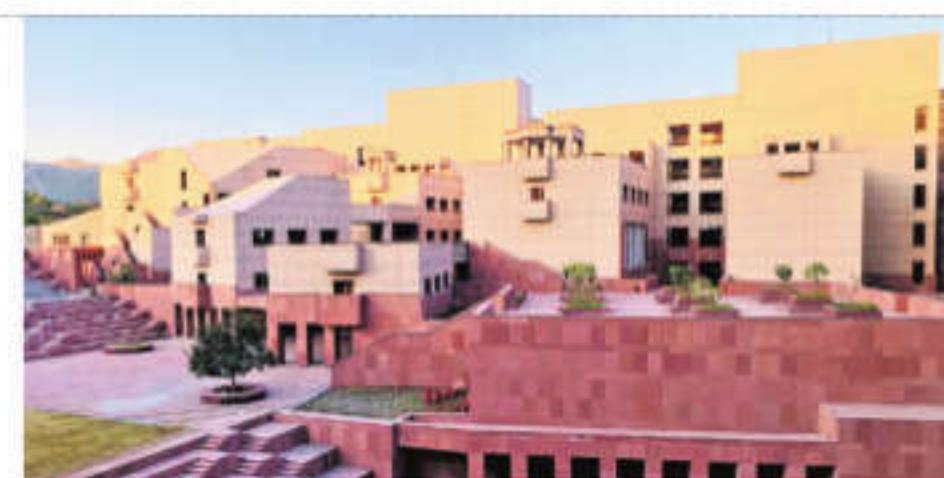
Meeting the eligibility criteria is only the first filter. While CAT scores remain central, IIM admissions typically evaluate candidates across multiple dimensions, making profile-building and clarity of goals relevant alongside exam preparation.

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 Samridhi, 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."

A young campus shaping its identity through depth, not scale

FOR aspirants comparing India's top management pathways, IIM Udaipur stands out for its clear academic focus and the way it blends research, digital capability, and industry exposure. Prof Ashok Banerjee, Director of IIM Udaipur, describes these as the institute's core identity. "Our identity is built on a strong emphasis on research, a future-oriented curriculum, and a deep commitment to values," he says.

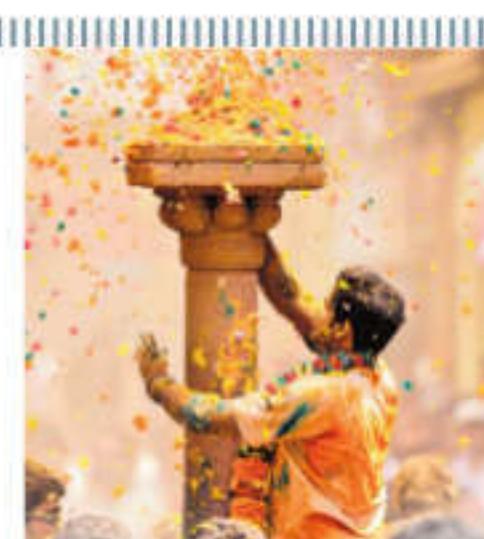
One of the institute's most distinctive choices has been to build depth in specific domains. The one-year MBAs in Digital Enterprise Management and Global Supply Chain Management are designed around emerging business needs, supported by a curriculum that consistently incorporates analytics, technology management, and sustainability. As Prof Banerjee puts it, "Digital is not an add-on at IIM Udaipur — it is part of our DNA."

Industry engagement is another deliberate priority. Courses co-designed with practitioners, advisory boards with leaders from varied sectors, and immersion-driven learning platforms give students early exposure to workplace expectations. A recently introduced Corporate Engagement Programme places faculty inside companies for short stints, strengthening the loop between academic insight and business practice.

Access remains part of the institute's long-term strategy. The bilingual BBA programme aims to widen the entry pipeline for students who may hesitate to pursue management education due to English fluency barriers. "The programme offers a smooth transition from bilingual instruction to academically strong English proficiency," Prof Banerjee says.

Beyond curriculum design, the institute places emphasis on applied learning as it marks its 15th year. Students engage with simulations, industry-linked projects, and immersion-based coursework supported by platforms such as the Behavioural Lab and specialised centres. Holistic development is built into campus life through over 40 student-driven clubs, peer-learning systems, and leadership roles that create space for responsibility and collaboration alongside academic work.

PROF ASHOK BANERJEE,
DIRECTOR OF IIM UDAIPUR



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 Aravalis on one side

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

