A Non-Traditional MCAT Study Method: The Spackle Approach

(find the holes, then fill them)

My brother, who finished his pediatrics residency in 2001 and is now happily paying off his medical school debts, describes his MCAT study method as follows:

He studied for a year. As he was working full time, raising two children, and finishing his premed courses while preparing for the exam, he was able to block out only two four-hour study periods per week; this turned out to be ample preparation time.

He used the Princeton Review’s MCAT prep book and an early 1990s edition of Flowers’s review book. (Note that Flowers's book is now published by the Princeton Review.) He also bought a packet of practice MCATs from the AAMC (note that online practice tests are now available from the AAMC; the AAMC’s self-assessment test would be a useful resource for this approach to MCAT prep, too.) He says that he spent much of his time on practice items, figuring that the questions he missed would reveal the holes in his background; if he missed a question, even for a trivial reason, he automatically spent an hour in the library studying the topic that the question covered. Over the course of the year, he worked through all of the practice items in his books and on the sample MCATs.

He took the MCAT once, earning a 44.

He would like students to note that he did not take a review course or study with a group. He says that it was most efficient for him to spend his limited study time working only on things that he did not know well; the practice test items that he missed were adequate to identify the holes in his knowledge or reasoning.

He says that his method could easily be used over a shorter time period, provided that the student spent more hours per week studying than he was able to spare.