

How to Prepare for the CASPer Test to Get Into Medical School

Learn what's covered, when to take it, and how to study, including CASPer practice questions and answers

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Part 1: CASPer Test Background

What is the CASPer Test?

CASPer (Computer-Based Assessment for Sampling Personal Characteristics) is an admissions test developed by researchers at McMaster University (Canada) that aims to measure traits like professionalism, ethics, communication, and empathy. It may be used by medical schools instead of or in addition to the traditional medical school interview.

Why was CASPer developed?

The test developers claim that traditional methods for evaluating applicants' personal characteristics (e.g., personal statement and other essays, letters of recommendation, and standard interviews) have been shown to be ineffective, and that CASPer provides adcoms a reliable measure of professionalism, ethics, communication, and empathy.

Which medical schools require the CASPer Test?

You can find a current list of the increasing number of medical schools that require the CASPer Test here.

Part 2: CASPer Test Logistics

How do I enroll for the CASPer Test?

You can enroll for the CASPer Test through <https://takecasper.com/>

How much does it cost to take CASPer?

As of April 2020, the non-refundable test fee for American students is \$12 ([click here](#) to learn about test fees for non-US students), with an additional \$12 fee for every med school you distribute your results to.

When is the CASPer Test offered? When should I take it?

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The CASPer Test is offered at least once a month and can be taken on any computer with internet connection. (CASPer explicitly discourages using a tablet or other mobile device to take the test) You can view the specific test dates [here](#).

CASPer recommends that you register for the exam at least three days before your test date to allow enough time for account verification and payment processing.

We recommend you register for the CASPer Test in April or May of your application year and take the exam while preparing your primaries (e.g., AMCAS)—or soon after—because a few schools have begun requiring a CASPer score to review your applications.

How long does it take for CASPer to be scored and sent to medical schools?

It takes three weeks for your CASPer exam to be scored and distributed to the med schools on your list.

How long will my CASPer results be valid?

Your CASPer scores will be valid for a single application cycle, and only for the program type (e.g., allopathic medical schools) for which you took the test.

Are testing accommodations offered for the CASPer Test?

Yes. CASPer requires that you submit a formal request and supporting documentation (e.g., psychoeducational assessment report) at least three weeks in advance of your test date to be considered for accommodations. You can learn more about CASPer accommodations [here](#).

Part 3: CASPer Test Format and Preparation

What format does the CASPer Test follow?

CASPer is an approximately 90-minute test that comprises 12 sections, 8 of which are video-based and 4 of which are word-based scenarios. Each scenario is followed by three

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questions that you have 5 minutes to respond to. The questions may or may not be directly related to medicine. (most are not) You can view sample CASPer questions [here](#).

Video-based scenarios include the following:

- A description of your role (e.g., “You are a friend.”)
- A 1- to 2-minute video
- Three open-ended questions (e.g., “How would you advise your friend in this situation?”)

Word-based scenarios include the following:

- A short statement to consider (e.g., “Think of a time you were pressured to compromise your values.”)
- Three open-ended questions

How is CASPer scored?

A different person scores each of the 12 sections. Graders are told to focus on answer content and ignore spelling, grammar, and syntax errors. Moreover, if the 5-minute timer for a given scenario expires while you’re still typing your responses, scorers will consider content included in your incomplete sentences.

As of April 2020 the test developers do not provide information on their site about how standard scores are produced.

Is it necessary to study for the CASPer Test?

The test developers claim that situational judgment tests like CASPer are *relatively* immune to test prep, that is, studying for CASPer is unlikely to boost your score. However, some research has demonstrated that applicants do benefit somewhat from advance preparation.

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While this doesn't mean that you *need* to study for CASPer, we recommend you do the following prior to taking the test:

- Ensure you can type at least 40 words per minute without major grammatical errors. (click [here](#) for a free typing speed test)
- Reflect on challenging experiences and personal weakness and failures, and practice concisely sharing lessons learned.
- Practice answering a few [sample questions](#).
- Brush up on medical ethics as necessary.

Part 4: CASPer Practice Questions and Answers

Now that we've explored the logistics and format of the CASPer Test, you can prepare for the test using a series of practice questions. We'll walk you through examples of the types of scenarios and questions you'll be given on the CASPer Test. We'll offer you a framework for thinking about each scenario, as well as sample responses and rationale for why these answers work.

For your convenience, we've provided written synopses below as an alternative to videos.

Then, read the framework we've offered as a way for you to approach the scenario, set a timer, and write your own responses. After five minutes, stop wherever you are—even if you haven't answered all the questions—and compare your responses with ours. Lastly, read the explanation for why our answers work.

The goal isn't to have the same responses as the ones you see here. You want to practice identifying and addressing the key components of each scenario. So if we cover an idea you didn't consider, take note and remember to address it when you take the real CASPer test.

Let's start your CASPer preparation with these scenarios.

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CASPer Practice Question #1: Paternity Leave

(Note: This question corresponds to **Video scenario example #1: Paternity leave**)

Here's the first video synopsis and the related set of questions:

A co-worker whose wife is pregnant is conflicted whether or not to take paternity leave. He and his wife would both like him to spend time at home with the baby, but doing so might take him out of consideration for an upcoming promotion at work. Should he prioritize family or career? In addition, his industry doesn't seem to support men who take paternity leave. A former colleague was penalized for taking leave and spent years stuck in the same position before finally leaving the company. As his co-worker, what do you think he should do?

1. Would you recommend he take paternity leave? Why or why not?
2. What strategies could you offer to help him make a decision that he feels comfortable with?
3. Maintaining a work-life balance can be challenging. Why do you think people struggle to find balance?

In this CASPer practice scenario, you want to demonstrate your empathy and problem-solving skills. How will you support your co-worker and help him find a positive solution to his dilemma?

Think about how the key ideas of the situation might relate to a physician's experience. In this scenario, the principle of patient autonomy stands out. Your co-worker has the right to make his own decisions concerning his life—as a patient makes their own decisions concerning their health. Your role is to provide the best information so they can make an informed decision.

These are our sample responses:

1. **Would you recommend he take paternity leave? Why or why not?** *Before making a recommendation, I would first gather more information. I would find the company's HR policy*

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on paternity leave and review it with my co-worker. Once we understood the policy, I would help my co-worker clarify his priorities in an accepting, non-judgmental way. Does he prioritize spending this time with his wife and child or securing a promotion to help him provide for them financially? Using the policy to inform us, I would support my co-worker in making a priority-based decision.

2. **What strategies could you offer to help him make a decision that he feels comfortable with?** *I would encourage my co-worker to gather information on the company culture surrounding paternity leave from multiple perspectives—including HR, his boss, and other colleagues who've taken leave. I would suggest he weigh the benefits and drawbacks of each option, both short-term and long-term.*
3. **Maintaining a work-life balance can be challenging. Why do you think people struggle to find balance?** *Sustaining work-life balance is challenging in today's society because technology makes everyone easily accessible. This allows work matters to intrude on non-work time. Employers sometimes demand too much from their employees, and employees may struggle to define their work-life boundaries. Additionally, everyone's ideal work-life balance is unique—some may feel balanced during 60-hour workweeks, while others would be overwhelmed. Maintaining work-life balance is in everyone's best interest because it improves productivity and overall health.*

Let's look at why these answers work.

The responses highlight the value of gaining multiple perspectives instead of accepting assumptions as truth. This is an important practice to follow as a physician, where making accurate diagnoses requires critical thinking, a dash of skepticism, and reviewing information from several sources.

The answers also demonstrate an understanding of how to support someone through the process of finding information, considering long-term consequences, and making decisions based on their priorities. An effective physician takes their personal priorities out of the equation when helping a patient make a difficult choice.

CASPer Practice Question #2: Store policy exception

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(Note: This question corresponds to **Video scenario example #2: Store policy exception**)

This the second video synopsis:

You're the manager at a retail store. A man tries to return a toy for a refund but doesn't have the original receipt. Due to store policy, the cashier states she can only offer him store credit. The man says his daughter came down with pneumonia, and he needs the cash to fill her prescriptions. He asks the cashier to make a policy exception for him. She turns to you. What do you think she should do?

1. As the store manager, would you give this customer a refund? Why or why not?
2. If you decide to abide by store policy, how could you refuse the refund in a way that shows empathy for the customer?
3. In your opinion, what is the most essential quality to possess in a customer service position? Explain your response.

For this CASPer practice scenario, there's no "right or wrong" answer. The important thing to discuss is your process of weighing two conflicting priorities—company policy and customer well-being. You'll want to demonstrate how you would pursue a win-win solution to the best of your ability, thinking through consequences and big-picture outcomes of your choices. And whether or not you decide to make a policy exception, you must display high levels of empathy and professionalism.

These are our sample responses:

1. **As the store manager, would you give this customer a refund? Why or why not?** *I would first take the customer aside to have a private conversation and seek more information about his situation. I would empathize with his worry over his daughter's health and want to help him if possible. I would consider two options—does the store contribute to charity or give back to the community? If so, I could issue a refund from the store's charitable fund. If not, I would consider altering the store refund policy. I would add a clause saying refunds could be issued without a*

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receipt based on the manager's discretion. I would also set a limit to the refund amounts to prevent the company from suffering financial harm.

- 2. If you decide to abide by store policy, how could you refuse the refund in a way that shows empathy for the customer?** *I would actively listen to his situation and validate his feelings of concern for his daughter. In a compassionate manner, I would apologize and explain I was unable to make an exception. I would try to offer alternative solutions to his problem—for example, recommend he inquire about a prescription payment plan or more affordable generic medication.*
- 3. In your opinion, what is the most essential quality to possess in a customer service position? Explain your response.** *I believe empathetic listening and respectful communication are essential to customer service. While a customer's request may need to be denied, the customer-provider relationship can be preserved if the customer feels they have been listened to and respected. This Maya Angelou quote summarizes effective customer service, "People will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."*

Here's why these responses work:

They demonstrate a concern for the customer while balancing the store policy and needs. Pulling the customer into a private conversation shows him compassion and professionalism. A solution was first sought within current store practice—making the refund a charitable contribution. Next, the policy itself was examined and altered to better serve customers. These solutions are guided by precedent and consideration of long-term implications.

As a physician, you have to balance your patients' best interests with the rules and guidelines governing your organization or practice. Under proper medical ethics, physicians are expected to criticize and seek change to policies that harm the well-being of patients.

CASPer Practice Question #3: Social media suspicion

(Note: This question corresponds to **Video scenario example #3: Social media suspicion**)

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Here's the third CASPer practice video synopsis:

Your project group members are frustrated because one member—Paul—left the group last minute, leaving everyone else with a lot of work to complete before the approaching deadline. Paul said he had to leave the group due to a worsening medical condition, but your classmate sees a photo of him at a pool party on social media. Your group members are conflicted. One wants to report Paul to the academic coordinator so he doesn't receive a grade for the group project he left. But your other classmate doesn't want to do anything without having all the facts—maybe it's an old photo, after all. It's your call, what should you do?

1. What do you recommend to your group members?
2. Do you think it is okay to report a concern to a supervisor based on a suspicion? Why or why not?
3. Do you believe that one false or inappropriate post on social media can have a lasting effect on someone's career? Explain your response.

In this CASPer practice scenario, you have to balance multiple perspectives and priorities, while resolving the conflict between your two remaining group members. You'll want to show how you consider alternative possibilities before jumping to conclusions and making potentially false accusations. And considering you and your classmate have grades on the line, you need to demonstrate how you would show maturity and adhere to your moral code despite the personal risk.

These are our sample responses:

1. **What do you recommend to your group members?** *I would ask to get more information before acting. I would meet Paul in person and determine if the photo was new or old. If he's truly ill and it was an old photo, I would ask how I could support him. If it's a new photo, I would express the group's concerns about the justice of the situation. If he's able to attend a party, is he able to contribute to the project and his own grade? I would give him the option to rejoin the group and complete the project with us. If he refused, I would explain the situation to the academic coordinator to protect my and the other group members' grades.*

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- 2. Do you think it is okay to report a concern to a supervisor based on a suspicion? Why or why not?** *It's my responsibility to make an effort to verify a concern before reporting it to my supervisor. If after seeking more information, I couldn't verify or disprove my concern, I would weigh the costs of staying silent or making a report. As a physician, if I suspected someone was putting a patient's life in danger, I would report my suspicion. I would trust my supervisor to use their resources to investigate the matter further and make a final decision.*
- 3. Do you believe that one false or inappropriate post on social media can have a lasting effect on someone's career? Explain your response.** *Yes, social media posts have the power to impact a person's career. Recently we've seen celebrities attacked for offensive posts they made in the past, even if their current views have changed. Professionals, especially those who require the public's trust like physicians do, should consider how their actions on social media could be interpreted by others.*

Why do these answers work?

They demonstrate the steps of gathering more information and giving the group member a chance to make the right decision before reporting his actions. According to medical ethics, physicians should have a commitment to being fair, and these sample responses display a desire to see justice done.

The second response addresses the difficulty of dealing with ambiguity, which occurs in the life of every professional. In the medical field, when patients' lives are at risk, doctors must think and act quickly, balancing the priority of giving someone the benefit of the doubt with the imperative to promote their patients' well-being. Showing you understand the complexity of these decisions indicate you will handle them appropriately when they arise in your practice.