

Steps to Paramedic Class Success

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Paramedic training is challenging in and of itself, but it is especially tough for a full-time firefighter with familial responsibilities. The prospect of attending paramedic class can make anyone hesitate. It is reasonable to ask, "Is the training worth the commitment needed to enroll in a paramedic class?" In the back of your mind, you are probably calculating lost overtime wages and the time away from family that the class will take.

There are strategies for those considering medic school (even while working and raising a family) that can offer you a running start toward successful course completion and paramedic certification. This article will convince you to attend paramedic class and achieve that inside track to success.

The stressful demands of a paramedic program include managing your time, developing study habits, and triaging priorities to find time to study. During class, you must fit clinical rotations into your schedule, balancing work, school, and personal time; mastering EMT knowledge can give you a distinct edge in this class. All of these issues and concerns can be managed with preparation and a definitive plan to excel. Attending a paramedic program on a whim without preparation is a big mistake. How can a student prepare and be motivated for success in paramedic training and to achieve certification?

WHAT'S YOUR MOTIVATION?

Some of you reading this article may want to be a paramedic to get a promotion to benefit your family; others desire to rise through the ranks of their department. Perhaps your department requires paramedic certification to stay on the job, or you are simply putting off going to paramedic school. Maybe the pay raise is not that significant, and the chances of getting promoted are not that favorable. So, why put yourself out and go to paramedic class?

I was a paramedic in a large urban EMS system when we merged with the fire department. At first, I resisted the change, but eventually I realized it was in my best interests to roll with the changes and do my best, even though the game had changed two-thirds of the way through my career. Success on the job never comes from a halfhearted approach to work. Change is constant, yet people often lose their desire to roll with change over time. The more you can adapt to change, the greater your chances of success.

ALL-HAZARDS FIRE SERVICE APPROACH

The focus of today's fire service is not solely on firefighting or entirely on EMS. In their heydays, fire departments were busy fighting fires and had little time or need to pick up EMS jobs. Departments like Miami, Florida; Los Angeles, California; and Seattle, Washington, were early adopters of the EMS mission. Presently, firefighters need cross training for response to a multitude of problems including terrorism, natural hazards, fires, and EMS runs. The question is not WHY I need to be a paramedic, but HOW will being a paramedic help me be the best leader in this dynamic world in which we respond?

Being a fire officer requires you to be knowledgeable in all areas of the fire service mission. EMS calls are a major part of the fire and emergency services and will be for the foreseeable future. The fire service needs leaders who can direct personnel in all types of incidents and represent the service in community meetings, city council deliberations, and legislative lobbying efforts. A well-prepared fire officer and chief are experienced, educated, and familiar with specialty operations including hazmat, confined space rescue, building collapse, and EMS. The

common thread to all incidents is the provision of service to a citizen, patient, taxpayer, voter, or community member. Being a paramedic puts you at the front line of service delivery.

PRIORITY MANAGEMENT

The first step to paramedic class success is determining where you spend your time. For one week, list how you spend each hour of the day. List idle time such as watching TV, online gaming, sports, family time, commuting time, and other ways you spend your days; most students are amazed how they spend their time. Colleges recommend two to three hours of study time for each hour of class time. With an awareness of how time is allocated, most students have found 20 hours they can redistribute toward medic class studies. You can view a time management lecture for paramedic students on MedicMentor online.

When planning to attend medic school, examine your values to see which activities are less important than school studies. Students usually place health, family, and work before medic class. Recreational activities can be done in spare time or in short bursts during study breaks.

DEVELOP THE LEARNING HABIT

A great medic once told me that the secret to a lifelong career and a satisfying life is continued learning. The incidents and patient problems we see in the field are repetitive. By taking the time to follow up on patients, especially when you are not sure if your treatment was helpful, you continue to learn. Learning about medications can also help you excel in EMS education. By researching the medications you see in the field, you'll develop an understanding of the associated medical problems and pertinent history. Make it a habit to look up unfamiliar medications, and follow up on your patients.

Lifelong learning requires an understanding of your personal learning style and finding strategies for adapting your learning style to your lifestyle. I often recommend flash cards for firefighters who are studying on the move. Flashcards require you to read the material, write it down, and then review the cards. I used to hold drug cards and put the ones down that I knew cold. In the end, I would have only the drugs I did not know well in my hand. I suggest making two cards per drug—the first card with indications and mechanisms of action and the second with the dosage and special considerations. Flashcards can also be shared with coworkers or fellow students.

DEVELOP YOUR STUDY SKILLS

When planning study time, ask yourself, "When is my best time to study?" and "How do I like learning?" Students often use reading or listening as a learning style. Some people enjoy a hands-on approach and learn better by actually doing.

I recommend recording your own podcasts using the free program Audacity, available at www.audacity.com. Students can benefit from recording a question, pausing before answering, and practice recalling the answer on their own. This type of quiz can facilitate recall of important facts. When learning material, try to think of how this information relates to what you have seen in the field and how it may be useful to you as a paramedic.

For those who prefer reading, there is a wealth of information online. However, be cautious of sources and the accuracy of information.

When reading a medic textbook, review the objectives at the start of each chapter. Objectives serve as the basis for quiz and test questions. An overview of the chapter will help you see the extent of what is covered in the chapter. Highlight terms in the textbook that are new to you and that need further study. You may prefer to make lists and flashcards or record information for playback while commuting or studying during downtime at work.

When studying anatomy and physiology, it is important to learn names of body parts and the components of the nervous system. However, it is more important to understand how they work

together to make the human body function. For example, hemoglobin carries oxygen in the blood; the alveoli are a terminal part of the lung. Real mastery occurs when you understand that oxygen enters the lungs during inspiration, diffuses through the alveoli, and attaches to hemoglobin. Understanding normal physiology serves as the basis for paramedic assessment and treatment of abnormal conditions.

SUGGESTIONS FOR EFFECTIVE STUDYING

- Study in short sessions.
- Organize information into smaller units.
- Use mnemonic devices to memorize information.
- Relate information to patient care experiences you have had.
- Make up scenarios that incorporate information you have learned.
- Drill on topics.
- Lead a drill on a medical device.

The best learning comes from teaching a topic. Form study groups with your classmates and do presentations in front of your group. Study groups can also be a highly effective learning tool and motivator; they help you compare your take on a subject against your classmates. Use reputable sources for deeper understanding of topics.

LEVERAGE PERFORMANCE WITH BASIC LIFE SUPPORT KNOWLEDGE

There are portions of the medic program that are predominantly basic life support (BLS) level or greatly dependent on a firm BLS foundation. You can leverage your performance in a paramedic class by mastering BLS airway management, trauma, burns, and obstetrics. What are some issues with each of these? Mastery of BLS airway management allows a paramedic to optimize patient condition prior to intubation in clinical field situations. Expertise is rewarded with opportunity in the clinical setting. Pay careful attention to face mask seals; ventilate only to chest rise, and train yourself to ventilate once every six to eight seconds. Also familiarize yourself with pulse oximetry and the basics of waveform capnography.

Being a paramedic implies mastery of BLS and excellence in advanced life support skills. Paramedic students should have an in-depth command of trauma and obstetrics (OB). When studying OB, students should be able to recall in detail the normal ovulatory cycle, fetal development, maternal changes, and the procedure for normal and complicated deliveries. OB is a subject medic students often fail to take as seriously as cardiology or respiratory.

EMTs attending medic class should also stay abreast of changes in protocols and treatment modalities. Emergency medicine is constantly evolving, and you must learn to keep up with changes and the standards of care. Remember, the secret to a successful career is continual learning and challenging ourselves to improve.

Know your protocols. Develop reputable resources that you can depend on for up-to-date information during medic class and after certification. Anticipate how you would react to a medical emergency and how you would apply the specific protocol. When visualizing the scenario, apply the protocols and challenge your ability by visualizing the patient condition worsening and needing additional protocols. Review a particular protocol after you have treated a patient with the condition, and connect the protocol with the patient experience for improved memory.

Paramedic training can be arduous for a college-age student who also works part time.

Paramedic class can be nearly impossible for an adult learner working part time, let alone the

firefighter working a full-time shift. Continuing your education while working in the fire service and raising a family can be a challenge. Set aside time to study as well as time for your family. I like my kids to know when I am studying; sometimes I will study with them. Your kids will learn that hard work is rewarded with graduation, certification, and advancement. Enlist the help of your coworkers where possible. Study with certified paramedics, take advantage of field calls while in class, and discuss what you learn with coworkers.

Being a paramedic is satisfying, rewarding, and a source of postretirement income. Many firefighters progress into nursing, working per diem on days off and transitioning to a postfirefighting career. Students with learning disabilities or test-taking issues should seek assistance from a tutor. You can succeed in paramedic training and benefit your career by managing priorities, developing good study habits, and leveraging key BLS areas in medic education. For more information on how to succeed in paramedic class, go to www.paramedicmastery.com.

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