FREE PREVIEW

BRAIN WITH KENJI

MRCS Part A Handbook

A practical roadmap from booking the exam to results day, written while working as an intern

74.2%
MY SCORE, SEPT 2026

8 weeks
ALONGSIDE INTERN YEAR

1 bank
PLUS PAST PAPERS

Kenji Miyauchi
Academic Track Intern, 2026/27

@brainwithkenji
kenjimiyauchi.substack.com

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1. Introduction

Welcome to the MRCS Part A Handbook. I sat Part A on 9 September 2026, a couple of months into my intern year, and passed. I prepared for it over eight weeks alongside a full-time intern job, using one question bank and past papers, and I kept a log along the way. This guide is built from that log, so the numbers you'll see are my real ones, the good weeks and the bad ones.

Sitting it this early was very much on purpose. I had finished my final med exams only a few months before, I was still in the rhythm of studying for an exam, and I knew that rhythm would be much harder to find a few months later (in January, for example). Having done it now, I genuinely think the start of intern year is the best time to sit Part A, and I'll explain why in Section 3.

When I started preparing, there wasn't a huge amount of information out there on how to prepare for Part A, and most of what I found was on Reddit. I went looking for any and every tip I could find. I also spoke to a good few people in the year above who had already sat the exam, and asked them how they prepared and which resources they used. This guide puts all of that in one place, and it's something I wish I'd had when I first started.

The hardest thing to find was what score you actually need on practice exams to pass. People didn't seem to really talk about it. So here is my short answer, which I explain in Section 7: **if you're over 70% on your Pastest past papers, you are comfortably in range to pass.**

This guide is for anyone thinking about Part A, whether you are in final year, an intern, or an SHO. Everything in it comes from my own preparation for the September 2026 sitting, so it is one route rather than THE route. Fees, dates and rules change between sittings, so please check anything that matters against the official college websites, such as RCSI's MRCS pages, before relying on it, and take my advice, like anyone's, with a grain of salt.

Whether you're just booking the exam or already deep into question banks, I hope this guide can be something you come back to whenever you need direction, or a bit of reassurance that it can be done on an intern's schedule.

Best regards,

Kenji

2. At a Glance

- **What it is:** Part A is the written half of the MRCS. It is two papers of single best answer questions sat on one day: 180 questions in Paper 1 and 120 in Paper 2, five hours in total. Part B is a separate OSCE that you sit after passing Part A.
- **What the bar looks like:** real pass marks have fallen from around 72% (2019 to 2021) to around 59 to 65% (2024 to 2025). The pass mark for my own sitting, September 2026, was 64.4%.
- **How I prepared:** eight weeks alongside full-time intern work, about 1 to 2 hours on weekdays and 3 to 5 hours at weekends. I used the Pastest question bank and past papers, and nothing else.
- **My numbers:** I started at 60% on Paper 1 and 70% on Paper 2 on a 2018 past paper. My best full past paper was 76.3%, at the end of August. On the day, I scored 221 out of 298 (74.2%) against a pass mark of 192 (64.4%).
- **What I'd change:** more weeks. My plan needed about 53 hours in the first three weeks and I had about 46.5, so I was behind from the start. Next time, I'd give myself 12 weeks.
- **Cost:** the exam fee (around €750) plus travel and a night away. Most of it can come back to you through CCERS and TSS, whether you pass or not (see Section 9).
- **Who it suits:** anyone heading for surgery in Ireland or the UK. If you've started intern year, I wouldn't tell anyone to wait: any of the sittings in your intern year works (September, January or April).

3. What is the MRCS, and where does it sit in training?

The MRCS (Membership of the Royal Colleges of Surgeons) is the exam you need to become a member of one of the surgical royal colleges. It is intercollegiate, which means the four colleges (England, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Ireland) run it together. Passing it in Dublin or in Cork counts the same as passing it in London.

It has two parts:

- **Part A**, a written exam of single best answer questions. This is what this guide is about.
- **Part B**, an OSCE that tests clinical and communication skills. You can only sit it once you have passed Part A. I haven't sat Part B yet. I'm planning to sit it once I have a year or so of surgical experience, as a CST trainee or in a stand-alone surgical job, and I'll add it to this guide when I do.

Where it sits in training. The MRCS is needed to complete core surgical training, not to start it. When I applied for CST in Ireland, Part A carried no points, but the online application asks whether you've completed Part A and/or Part B, and it's something you can talk about at interview (see Section 11).

So why sit it early? For me, it came down to two things.

1. **It's better to get exams out of the way if you can.** You only get busier from here, especially once you're a surgical SHO, or doing research or a masters on top of your job.

END OF PREVIEW

MRCS Part A Handbook

That's the end of the free preview.
The full guide is available at
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@brainwithkenji · kenjimiyauchi.substack.com