

SAT & PSAT

Preparation

Overview

Short-term Preparation

- Preparation should focus on the test itself.
- Students should know what to expect so far as type of questions, how many, in what order.
- Students should know the test directions for every type of question.
- They should learn
 - * how to pace themselves,
 - * when and how to guess,
 - * how to identify the easiest questions.

Long-Term Preparation

- Long-term preparation focuses on academic performance in general, not just on the test.
- Long-term preparation includes reading more effectively, improving one's vocabulary, and developing one's problem-solving abilities.

The SAT

The SAT is a standardized test that measures verbal and mathematical skills you need to succeed in college—skills that you have been developing throughout your life, both in and out of school.

Specifically, the SAT is designed to help colleges predict your freshman grades in college, so that admission officers can make appropriate decisions about your chances of succeeding academically at their colleges.

The PSAT

- It gives practice for SAT.
- It is the first step in qualifying for scholarships sponsored by the National Merit Scholarship Corporation and other scholarship programs.
- The PSAT is composed of test questions that have been used on the SAT, but the PSAT is shorter.
- The PSAT is not quite as difficult as the SAT because of the mix of questions. The PSAT includes fewer of the most difficult questions.

Timing

The PSAT/NMSQT is 2 hours and 10 minutes long and consists of five test sections:

2 Reading Sections	2 Math Sections	One Writing Section
25 minutes	25 minutes	30 minutes
25 minutes	25 minutes	

What's on the SAT?

The SAT includes critical reading, math, and writing sections:

Types of Questions	Number of Questions
Critical Reading	
Sentence Completions	19
Passage Based Reading	48
Total	67
Math	
Multiple Choice	44
Student-Produced Responses	10
Total	54

What's on the SAT? (continued)

The SAT includes critical reading, math, and writing sections:

Types of Questions	Number of Questions
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Writing

Improving Sentences	20
Identifying Sentence Errors	14
Improving Paragraphs	6

One essay

Content and Number of Questions

Critical Reading

Extended Reasoning	42 - 50
Literal Comprehension	4 - 6
Vocabulary in Context	12 - 16
Critical Reading Score	200 – 800

70 minutes total

Content and Number of Questions

Writing

Improving Sentences	25
Identifying Sentence Errors	18
Improving Paragraphs	6

Writing Score 200 - 800

Essay Subscore	2 - 12
Multiple Choice Subscore	20 - 80

Timing

The SAT is three hours and 45 minutes long and consists of 10 separately timed sections:

3 Reading Sections	3 Math Sections	3 Writing Sections	1 Variable Section
25 minutes 25 minutes 20 minutes	25 minutes 25 minutes 20 minutes	25 minutes 10 minutes 25 minute essay	25 minutes

- The variable section does not count toward the final score.
- It is used to try out new questions for future editions of the SAT and to help make sure that the test scores are comparable to scores on other editions of the SAT.
- Students won't be able to tell which section this is.

Scoring the Multiple Choice

The number of questions answered right minus a fraction of the multiple-choice questions answered wrong is computed.

No points are earned or subtracted for unanswered questions, and nothing is subtracted from the score for incorrect answers to grid-in questions.

If the resulting score includes a fraction, the score is rounded to the nearest whole number— $\frac{1}{2}$ or more is rounded up; less than $\frac{1}{2}$ is rounded down.

Scoring the Multiple Choice (continued)

On the SAT, the score is converted into a 200 (lowest) to 800 (highest) scaled score using a statistical process called equating. Tests are equated to adjust for minor differences between test editions. Equating assures test takers and colleges that a score of 500 on one version indicates the same level of ability on another edition. The equating process also ensures that a student's score doesn't depend on how well others did on the same test.

Scoring the Essay

**The writing score will range from 200 - 800.
It will include 2 subscores:**

Essay 2-12 points

(30% of the writing score)

Multiple choice 20 - 80 points

(70% of the writing score)

Basic Test-taking Strategies

- Keep moving.
- Don't get hung up on a single question.
- If you have finished other questions in that section, then you can go back.
- If you skip a question, put a mark on the test booklet next to the question. You may want to consider putting a mark on your answer sheet. This will help you in finding it, and you won't put all following answers in the wrong place.

Basic Test-taking Strategies (continued)

- Eliminate choices.
 - If you don't know the correct answer, try eliminating wrong choices. Sometimes it's easier to find the wrong ones than the right one.
 - If you can eliminate one choice as definitely wrong, guess from among the remaining answers.
- Use your test booklet as scratch paper.
- When working on a question, put a line through each choice as you eliminate it.

Basic Test-taking Strategies (continued)

- Check your answer sheet periodically. Losing your place is a major disaster.
- One suggestion is to fold the test booklet back so that you're looking at only one page at a time.
- Keep the answer sheet close to the test booklet as you work.
- Check that the number of the text question on the answer sheet and in the test booklet agree every few minutes.

Basic Test-taking Strategies (continued)

- Don't panic.
- Know that some questions are harder than most classroom tests.
- Know that you won't be able to answer all the questions.
- Remember you don't have to answer every question.
- Take a breather if necessary.

Basic Test-taking Strategies (continued)

- Don't lose points to carelessness.
- Read **ALL** the answers before selecting your answer.

Basic Test-taking Strategies (continued)

- Critical Reading questions take an investment in time. You can't begin to answer them until you've read the passage. Try to answer all the questions you can about one reading passage before you move on to another passage or back to the short-answer questions.
- Mark sections, sentences, or words in reading passages.

Basic Test-taking Strategies (continued)

- Don't spend 5 minutes digging out the answer to a particular question until you have tried the other questions. You may pick up extra information from the passage that will help you answer one question when you're searching for the answers to others.
- The fastest reading questions to answer are usually the vocabulary-in-context questions.

Basic Test-taking Strategies (continued)

- Don't lose work you've done.
- Make sure you mark in the test booklet all the questions you might want to come back to.
- Cross out answers you have been able to eliminate so that you don't come back and reread these same incorrect answers.

Basic Test-taking Strategies (continued)

- Pacing is very important. Work from easier to harder questions, from shorter to longer. Remember that all questions are worth the same.
- Begin to work as soon as the testing time begins.
- Check your progress in a section to see that you are moving at an appropriate pace. If you take 10 minutes to read a passage and answer 10 questions on it, you are possibly working faster than you should be.

General Strategies from Peterson's

- Wear a watch to the test and practice at home using your watch.
- Practice so that you know your strengths and what kinds of questions you answer best. Each right answer is worth the same score (roughly 10) no matter how easy or hard.
 - Save the hardest, most time-consuming questions for last.
 - Let your answers rest in peace. Don't change to an afterthought answer unless you know it's correct. Your first gut-reaction answer is probably right.

General SAT Strategies from Gruber

- Become familiar with each type of question, and then practice applying the strategies.
- The average times to be spent on questions are as follows:

Sentence completion 40 seconds

Reading Comprehension with

3 questions 4 min.

4 questions 5 min.

5 questions 6 min.

6 questions 7 min.

7 questions 9 min.

General SAT Strategies from Gruber

- If two choices look equally good, guess and go on.
- Beware of answers with clues that seem too obvious.
- If you have to try all the choices, start with Choice E.

General SAT Strategies from Princeton Review

- To achieve certain scaled scores, you need to be aware of what raw score is needed:

To get a 500, you need a raw score of about 35.

To get a 600, you need a raw score of about 52.

To get a 700, you need a raw score of about 66.

Myths

- ***Questions are tricky.*** Many of the hard questions require careful attention. Some have incorrect answers that look good at first glance or that will seem correct if a student doesn't pay attention.
- ***There's more than one right answer.*** All questions are thoroughly tried out before they're used. The questions are constructed so that they have only one correct or best answer except for some math grid-in questions, which may have several correct answers.
- ***It tests intelligence.*** College boards says that it does not measure inborn talents. The SAT tests verbal and mathematical reasoning.

Myths

- ***All tests aren't alike.*** Regardless of when and where a student takes the SAT, all editions are of comparable difficulty.
- ***Students should never guess.*** Total random guessing is chancy. Students do have one chance in five of picking the right answer. Points are subtracted for wrong answers. On multiple-choice questions, if a student can eliminate even one answer as being definitely wrong, the student should make a guess.

Myths

- ***It's a hard test.*** It is different from most classroom tests. Students aren't expected to be familiar with everything on the test. The SAT covers a wide range of material. If a student gets about half the questions right, he/she is doing better than average.
- ***You can't prepare.*** Some preparation can help in a short period of time. Other skills require a lot more time and effort to have a significant effect.

Long-Term Preparation

Building Vocabulary Skills

- The single most effective thing students can do to build vocabulary, over time, is to read a lot. Vocabulary building is a long-term effort.
- Memorizing lists of words and their definitions is not particularly useful.
- Students should be taught to try to figure out what an unfamiliar word means from its context.
- When a student looks up a word in the dictionary, he/she should pay attention to the different definitions and the contexts in which each is appropriate.

Long-Term Preparation

Building Vocabulary Skills

- Students should pay close attention to roots, prefixes, and suffixes.
- Memorizing the meanings of roots, prefixes, and suffixes will be more helpful than memorizing individual words.
- Apply knowledge of foreign languages, especially those related to Latin, such as Spanish, French, and Italian. English has many cognates or words with similar meanings from these languages.
- Playing word games can help (such as Scrabble or Boggle) and work crossword puzzles.