

NEW

SHSAT

Verbal Prep Book To Improve Your Score In Two Months

The Most Effective Strategies for
Mastering Reading Comprehension
and Revising/Editing on the SHSAT

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Edited by Dr. Steve Warner

SECOND EDITION

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

THE SHSAT



he SHSAT (Specialized High Schools Admission Test) is a test taken by 33,000 students each year in New York City. Each borough has between one and three schools which are classified as specialized schools. Each of these schools requires students to sit for this 180 minute exam in late October in order to qualify. Some schools are much more competitive than others, with only 1-2% of applicants being accepted for admission. Since it is so competitive, even a slight advantage that a course or book can offer you is very important. The examples, explanations and worksheets provided in this book have been carefully worked out to give you the extra advantage that you will need. This means that you have to be very diligent in using the book. Do not skip over sections, and you may even want to go through some sections more than once if you find yourself struggling the first time through.

This test looks very different from every test you have taken in the past, and in fact it is very different. There is a verbal section which has 57 questions with a **suggested** time of 90 minutes. The test makers are now calling the verbal section the **ELA (English Language Arts)** section. The math section has 57 questions as well, also with a suggested time of 90 minutes. A student who is very strong in either math or verbal questions can go through one of these sections in less time, giving him or her more time for the other section. For example, a student that can complete one of these sections in 80 minutes will have 100 minutes for the other section. This would give those students a distinct advantage, of course. A number of the questions given on the test will not count, as they are experimental. There is no way to know which questions count and which do not, so take them all seriously.

The ELA section consists of revising/editing and reading comprehension. The math section covers topics such as arithmetic, algebra, geometry, probability and statistics.

What to Expect

You may find yourself working hard without showing any improvement at first. Many students experience this and then give up. Do not be one of them. You will improve in spurts rather than here and there. It will be a series of epiphanies that result in that AHA moment. As you master each revision/editing question and start to get comfortable with all of the grammar being tested, you will start believing in yourself. You will no longer have any fear that you will miss one of those. That will build your confidence—one of the most important factors for performing well on any exam. If you step to the plate with full belief that you will hit the ball well, then that is much more likely to actually happen. If you approach the plate in fear and without believing in yourself, you might as well not show up.

How Is This Test Different?

Briefly, this test asks students in almost every question to think on a level that most other tests seldom do. The test consists of many types of questions that you may be unfamiliar with. For instance, you will be asked to make a series of edits from a short passage that you have just read. Since you have probably not done any formal editing before, this may be very difficult. In time, having read the grammar introduction and the editing guide and having done a few of the passages, you will start to get the hang of it. Try to see the whole process as a game you are playing. Our minds function much better when we are playing games and having fun. We therefore encourage you to see this as entertainment both when practicing and when taking the actual test. The test will be throwing roadblocks in your way and you need to find ways to overcome them.

A Problem

This test has been historically one of the most guarded tests in America. Once it is administered, all copies of the exam are collected and placed back in a vault. Consequently, very few copies of actual exams have ever been made public. This gives students who want to practice actual tests very little opportunity to do so. All students in public schools can ask their counselors for a copy of the Specialized High Schools Student Handbook. This is free and can be obtained by non-public school students by contacting their local public junior high school or by calling the department of education directly. **It contains two full exams to practice on.** We recommend using these tests towards the end of your preparation so that you can get comfortable with the way they ask questions.

Getting into a Particular School

Each school has a cut-off score for admission. The most difficult schools, together with their cut-off scores have been:

- Stuyvesant – 565
- Bronx High School of Science – 535
- Staten Island Tech – 510

Although each school has a cut-off number, these numbers are not written in stone. They vary each year depending on the difficulty level of the test, how many students applied to the school, and the number of seats they have available. If you choose a school as your first choice and you get in, you must go to that school. If you do not make your first choice, then you can go to your second or third choice, etc.

Make sure you get your application in by early September.

The following are estimates of how many questions you have to answer correctly to get into some of the top schools:

- Stuyvesant – 84-86
- Bronx High School of Science – 74-78
- Staten Island Tech – 74-78

These numbers also vary from year to year.

Do I Lose Points for Guessing Wrong Answers?

No. There are no deductions for wrong answers. However, we strongly recommend that you **DO NOT** rush through the test. Take your time on each question. Some of our students use a strategy of just doing the first 80-90% of questions in a particular section and then going on to the next section. They then go back to those sections where they left questions out in order of how well they usually score on them. They do this because the hardest questions on the test are always the final few in each section. They know that they can get the easy and medium questions correct as long as they are careful, so they don't rush to the hard ones. This ensures that they have enough time to do all the easy and medium questions in both sections. Some students don't like this strategy because they don't like to leave questions out at all. However, unless you always finish with lots of time to spare, this is a solid technique to use.

GRAMMAR

The latest version of the SHSAT has 20 revising/editing questions. Students that have strong grammar skills will excel at this part of the test. This is cause for joy for students from private schools, and particularly Catholic schools, as these schools spend much more time on grammar than public schools. This does not mean that private school students should just skip this section. You really want to make sure that you are at the top of your game. Studying this part of the book and doing all of the exercises will be a sufficient grammar review. Make sure to review the explanations carefully, as they are there to guide you and to make sure that you understand any errors you have made. This will minimize the probability of making those errors again.

Public school students will also do fine on this part of the exam, as long as they take the time to go through this part of the book carefully. You will also be helped by spending 10 minutes on the grammar part of freerice.com every week. The site gives you two choices and asks you to decide which one is correct. By doing this each week, you will train your eye to see errors quickly. The site rates your ability level from 0 through 5. Try to maintain at least level 4, and always be striving to achieve level 5.

This section will review the various aspects of grammar you should be aware of. We have paid particular attention to the types of errors you will be expected to recognize on this specific exam. By doing all of the samples and going through the explanations carefully, you will develop a confidence level that will allow you to start the test on a real high. So let's start out by establishing some basic definitions.

- This book provides lots of examples for every verbal part of the exam. To receive additional problems with solutions visit the following webpage:

www.satprepget800.com/SHSATPrmX2

Basic Definitions

Noun: A word that refers to people and nameable things such as: book, ostrich, Galileo, hoodlum, Tennessee. Abstract things are also nouns: fear, joy, beauty, sin.

Pronoun: A word that takes the place of, or “sits in” for a noun:

Personal pronouns:

Subjective: he, she, it, they, I, you, we

Objective: him, her, it, them, me, you, us

Possessive pronouns: his, her, its, theirs, mine, yours, ours

Question and relative pronouns: who, whom, which, where, why, when, what, whose, etc.

The underlined words in the following sentence are pronouns:

Example: My buddies say they want to come watch me at my game, but I think having them there might make me somewhat nervous.

If we did not use pronouns, the sentence would sound like this:

Example: Peng's buddies say Peng's buddies want to come watch Peng at Peng's game, but Peng thinks having Peng's friends there might make Peng somewhat nervous.

Obviously, that would sound ridiculous.

Verb: A word that is an action or state such as: kick, grapple, climb, wonder, think, explore, remind.

Linking verbs: to be, is, are, was, were, has, have and had been, will or shall be, etc.

A verb is active when the subject does the action—John captured the prize. It is passive when the object appears as the subject and the subject as the object—The prize was captured by John.

Example: Quan is angry because she was informed that the robotics contest was cancelled. She had been working with her group for six months to prepare for the event.

Adjective: A word that describes a property or state. It is used to modify or describe a noun. Some examples are ornery, haphazard, blue, obvious, gracious, cancerous, etc.

Example: The long-awaited Second Avenue subway line has been a true pleasure for many commuters.

Example: Khalid is **rich**.

Note that adjectives follow linking verbs.

Adverb: A word that describes verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs.

Example: Carlos walked vigorously. (describes the verb walked)

Example: Rong was **fabulously** wealthy. (describes the adjective wealthy)

Example: Ha-Yoon walked **very** slowly. (describes the adverb slowly)

Conjunction: (The terms coordinator and subordinator are sometimes used.) A word that connects two clauses.

Coordinating conjunctions connect two complete thoughts: and, or, nor, but, yet, so, for.

Example: Rachel loved music, **but** only classical pieces.

Subordinate conjunctions begin a dependent clause.

Example: Yoshi won the match **despite** double faulting on his serve twice in the final game.

Sometimes the test makers will try to confuse you by having the incorrect conjunction in the sentence.

Example: Anaya has a rash **and** she is probably allergic to something. Instead of “and” we should use “so.”

Example: L.A. is interesting to visit **and** I would not want to live there. Here, the sense of the sentence tells us that the word should be “but” rather than “and.”

Preposition: A word that typically expresses time or spatial relationships. Prepositions are followed by a few words forming a phrase that always ends with a noun or pronoun, and they are used to describe a noun or pronoun, or help clarify a concept. Usually the word the preposition describes comes right before it.

Complete List of Prepositions. Try to become familiar with the following list, as any pronoun following them must be an objective pronoun.

about	below	for	on	toward
above	beneath	from	out	under
across	beside	in	outside	until
after	between	inside	over	up
against	beyond	into	since	upon
around	by	like	through	with
at	down	near	throughout	without
before	during	of	till	
behind	except	off	to	

- An important thing to realize about prepositional phrases is that they are not grammatically essential to a sentence. They add meaning, but try removing them from the sentence and you will notice that nothing essential really changes. They will not make the sentence any more or less correct, or change the basic structure of the sentence. So, get into the habit of mentally crossing them off and you will start to notice a lot of grammatical errors, especially agreement problems.

Example: The dancer in the back slipped, but few seemed to notice. If we remove the prepositional phrase "in the back," we get the sentence “even though the dancer slipped, few seemed to notice.” Notice that with the prepositional phrase deleted, the reader still knows the essential information.

Subjects and Objects: Every sentence must have both a subject and an object. Occasionally, the subject is understood without being stated.

Example: Jump! Here we have the verb, jump, and understood is the pronoun, you. Usually the subject will precede the verb, but it can also follow it.

Example: In the first row of the orchestra sat Robert and he.

Example: Robert and he sat in the first row of the orchestra.

Clauses: These are any phrases within a sentence that contains both a subject and an object.

An *independent clause* can stand by itself as a complete thought. It can also be combined with other clauses.

A *dependent clause* cannot stand by itself. It needs an independent clause.

Example: Volcanoes, creating huge gaps in the earth.

Example: Lebron James, the best all round basketball player in the history of the National Basketball Association.

- The second one may sound like a sentence, but it does not contain a central verb and is therefore a **sentence fragment**.

We could complete these fragments by adding an independent clause to them.

Example: Volcanoes, creating huge gaps in the earth, can wreak havoc.

Example: Lebron James, the best all round player in the history of the NBA, has either won or been in the finals of the NBA championship virtually every year he has been in the league.

Any clause beginning with a subordinate conjunction must be a dependent clause. When a sentence begins with a subordinate clause, it must be followed by a comma. If the sentence begins with an independent clause, there is no requirement to use a comma.

Example: I rested after I returned from a fifteen mile run.

List of subordinate conjunctions:

after	before	rather than	when
although	despite	since, so	whenever
as, as far as	even if	so that, than	where
as if, as long as	even though	that	whereas
as soon as	every time, if	though	wherever
as though	in order that	unless	while
because	now that	until	

When you want to connect two independent clauses, just use a comma and one of the FANBOYS (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so). You can also use a semicolon to combine two independent clauses. They can fit wherever you might place a comma + and (that is, we can always replace “, and” with “;”).

Example: Seo-Yeon likes to play lacrosse; her sister, ji-woo prefers Ultimate Frisbee.

Colons can also be used to combine two independent clauses, but only when they are closely related to each other.

Example: I love playing chess: it is exciting, challenging, and intellectually stimulating.

Use a colon when the second clause is explaining the first. It generally fits in the same place that “because” or “for example” would be placed.

REVISING/EDITING STAND-ALONE QUESTIONS

Problem Set 1

1. Read this sentence.

A pseudo community is just a different kind of network—its friendships and loyalties are transient, its problems are universally considered to be someone else’s problems (someone else who should be paid to solve them).

Which edit should be made to correct this sentence?

- A. change the dash after *network* to a comma
- B. change the comma after *transient* to a semicolon
- C. change *else’s* to *elses’*
- D. delete the parentheses after *problems* and after *them*

2. Read this paragraph.

(1) In high school I excelled at many sports, but basketball was my love. (2) I entertained thoughts of a college scholarship and even a professional career. (3) All of that came tumbling down with one wrong movement. (4) When I went to the doctor, he suspected that I sprained my ankle.

Which sentence should be revised to correct an error in tense?

- A. sentence 1
- B. sentence 2
- C. sentence 3
- D. sentence 4

3. Read this sentence.

Having studied hard for the fire department captain’s exam, Bill felt capable to make distinctions among the various techniques for entering a burning building.

Which edit should be made to correct this sentence?

- A. change *Having studied* to **About to study hard**
- B. change *captain’s* to **captains’**
- C. change *capable to make* to **capable of making**
- D. change *among* to **between**

4. Read this paragraph.

(1) Bridget had recently become very interested in politics. (2) She had started to regularly attend political speeches in her community. (3) Having heard two local candidates give speeches, she was convinced that neither of them were likely to be elected in the primary. (4) They completely lacked the charisma necessary to inspire people.

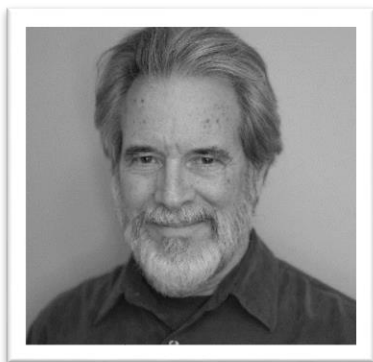
Which sentence contains an error in agreement?

- A. sentence 1
- B. sentence 2
- C. sentence 3
- D. sentence 4

Explanations

1. B is the answer because the use of a semicolon prevents us from having a run-on sentence, which is one of the worst grammar errors. Using a dash is perfectly fine in the first sentence. There is no problem with using parentheses in the final sentence. Else's is correct in B.
2. D is the answer, as what is called the "past perfect" is required. He would not have been at the doctor's office unless he had already hurt his ankle. Thus, that action (hurting his ankle) must have occurred **before** he went to the office. **Rule:** Use "had" before a verb if it indicates an action that took place before another action in the sentence.
3. C is the answer, as it just happens to be the accepted idiom. That means that we have just accepted that this is the preferred way of speaking (or writing). Start listening much more carefully to how educated people speak (and write). That is pretty much the only way to avoid these errors unless you just happen to have an exceptional ear for language. None of the other changes should be made.
4. C is the answer because the verb should be "was" rather than "were." This is because only one of them can be a candidate that she would vote for.

About the Authors



Larry Ronaldson has taught SHSAT courses for 35 years. During that time, he and his teachers have the envious track record of getting 70% of their students into Stuyvesant, Bronx High School of Science, Staten Island Tech and Brooklyn Tech.



Deirdre Storck has been teaching middle school and high school students how to prepare for the SHSAT, ACT, and SAT for over fifteen years. She attended Stuyvesant High School and then the University of Delaware Honors Program. She taught math at Bay Ridge Prep in Brooklyn, NY for several years, and she is currently a software developer in Seattle, WA where she lives with her family.

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