

SAT CHEAT SHEET



**Surefire Ways to Excel on the SAT and
Achieve Top Scores!**



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SAT CHEAT SHEET:

Surefire Ways to Excel on the SAT and Achieve Top Scores!

Now more than ever, the college admissions process is challenging, time-consuming, and fiercely competitive. While a few colleges have made tests like the SAT optional, an overwhelming majority still use scores as an integral part of the admissions process. You will want to do your best to earn top scores.



Colleges use only a student's best scores, so taking tests more than once can help!

Many high schools offer the PSAT to help 9th and 10th graders identify testing strengths and weaknesses prior to taking the PSAT and SAT in the 11th grade.

Junior year, the PSAT is also the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (NMQT) and high-scoring students can earn substantial scholarships.

Junior year also is the time to take the SAT for the first time.

Many students take the SAT two or three times, so it is common for students to sign up to take the test twice during junior year. With college application deadlines creeping earlier and earlier each fall, most students will want to take the SAT once or twice junior year, knowing that the October test during their senior year is one last opportunity to raise scores, if necessary.

To excel on the SAT, students need to understand and develop an overall strategy for the three separately graded sections: Reading, Math, and Writing.

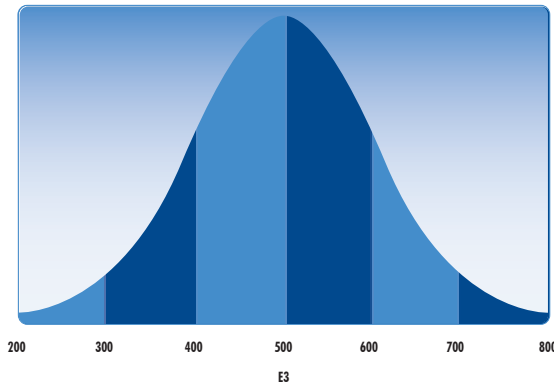
OVERALL STRATEGY

1. Understand the Test

The SAT isn't like most tests students take in school.

In school, students who attend class, complete assignments, work hard, and study can expect to earn "A's" and "B's" on most exams. The SAT is written so that most students will earn average scores (400 to 600 points per section).

Very few students will earn scores above 650 on any section.



This bell curve distribution of grades is intentional and created by balancing easy, medium, and hard questions on every section. Unfortunately, most students are unaccustomed to taking tests with questions so hard that less than 10% of test takers will have a chance to answer correctly.

2. Leave Questions Blank

On the SAT, correct answers are worth one point on a student's raw score, while wrong answers subtract $\frac{1}{4}$ a point. This scoring system costs many students points, because most have been taught to answer every question and make an educated guess even when they are unsure.

Only students who realistically believe they can score 650 or above on a section should attempt to answer all questions.

Some students will improve their scores by leaving as much as 60% of the test blank and focusing on accurately answering the remaining questions. By answering the easy and medium-difficulty questions and leaving the hardest questions blank, students can earn more points and avoid the penalty for wrong answers.

3. Pace Yourself

The SAT is a timed test made up of 10 sections. Working at a steady and focused pace is essential for success. Working timed practice tests will help students develop a sense for the pace that allows them to move effectively through each section while still maintaining accuracy.

The SAT takes over four hours—a marathon of test taking.

Students need to build stamina to make it through the three hours and 50 minutes of timed content on the SAT. Develop test-taking endurance by practicing periods of intense focus. This can be achieved by taking practice SATs or by working reading, math, and writing assignments for school in a quiet, focused setting. Students must train their brains and bodies to be able to sit through the test.

READING

1. Vocabulary! Vocabulary! Vocabulary!

50% of a student's SAT Reading score is based on knowledge of college-bound vocabulary. All the strategies in the world can't make up for a lack of vocabulary knowledge.

Begin as early as 7th grade developing an extensive knowledge of college-bound words.

2. Read for Detail

On a daily basis, most of us are bombarded with written information: text messages, emails, assignments, signs, books, webpages, and articles. To manage the volume of information, most people skim rather than read for detail. However, the SAT Reading section is based on careful reading and attention to detail.

The difference between the correct answer and the next-best choice could be ONE word.

Practice reading for detail and observing slight differences in wording among answer choices.

3. Focus on Eliminating Wrong Answers

SAT Math questions have one right answer; SAT Reading questions have a “best” answer. Many times the correct answer seems lacking in content, but it was the best of the available choices.

When you eliminate the wrong answers it makes it easier to compare and evaluate what remains.

MATH

1. Write It Out!

Calculators—even graphing calculators—are allowed during the SAT, but they can’t replace the power of writing in the test booklet.

Writing = Thinking!

Sketch figures, write out equations, pencil-in possible values, and detail out the multiple steps. Too many careless errors are made on SAT Math because students think they will save time by doing all the steps in their heads.



2. Know When to Trust the Drawings

It is wise to be cautious because so many questions involve potentially tricky material, but you can trust the figures in the math section until you are told not to.

Most SAT Math drawings ARE drawn to scale and you can make estimates based on how the figure looks.

3. Easy, Medium, then Hard

All questions on the SAT that aren't based on passages begin easier and get harder as you go. No section makes this order of difficulty more obvious than math.

Focus on earning points from easy and medium questions.

Many students should leave the hard questions BLANK.

WRITING

1. The Essay: What and How You Write



SAT essays are graded on “what” and “how” you write. (I should know; I was an official essay reader!) Some students sacrifice variety of language or sentence structure to focus on content. Others focus too much on writing without errors and don't understand how a lack of depth and content will affect their scores.

Find the right balance of content and style.

What you write: depth of examples, organization, and analysis.

How you write: college-bound vocabulary, varied sentence structure, and freedom from errors.

2. Grammar Is Paramount

While many students stress over the SAT essay, the multiple-choice portions of the SAT Writing section are far more important.

A perfect essay, but no points on the multiple-choice ≈ 370
Perfect multiple-choice answers, but a zero on the essay ≈ 670

Multiple-choice grammar is the most important element. The two multiple-choice Writing sections are designed to test students' knowledge of grammar and usage.

3. Avoid “Sounds Good” Grammar

Most high school English teachers are so busy teaching literature, analysis, and composition that they don't take time to review basic errors in grammar and usage. This is even truer with high-achieving classes or students who tend to demonstrate proficiency in their own writing.

I remember my own teachers saying, “Do what sounds right!” This approach served me well, but then both of my parents were English teachers, so what sounded right to me tended to be right.

Unfortunately, the SAT writers know how to write sentences that sound right, yet contain errors...and also sentences that sound terrible, but are technically correct.

You cannot rely on how a sentence sounds. Instead, focus on commonly tested error types.

Megan Dorsey – College Prep LLC



Megan Dorsey is a college admissions expert and savvy SAT prep instructor who has helped thousands of students prepare for the SAT and ACT. Before founding College Prep, LLC, she served as a college counselor at Westside High School, where she developed the SAT and college planning curriculum for the Houston Independent School District (HISD). In her last year at Westside, the graduating class of 550 seniors earned over \$14 million in scholarships and attended prestigious schools such as MIT, Rice, and Stanford.

Megan is a former SAT essay reader for the College Board, a Texas Education Agency-certified high school teacher and counselor, and a member of the expert panel for unigo.com, a college admissions resource site. She earned her B.A. at Rice University, her M.Ed. at the University of Houston, and her Certificate in College Counseling at UCLA.

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