

## **What is the SAT?**

The SAT is a standardized examination designed to measure students' abilities in three areas: reading, writing, and mathematical reasoning. Many American colleges and universities, including the most prestigious, consider SAT scores an important factor in judging the quality of applicants.

Why do American schools care about the SAT? They care because it provides a level playing field for applicants to demonstrate their abilities. Since grading standards undoubtedly vary from one school to another, there is no way to know whether one student with a 4.0 GPA is truly as talented as another student with the same GPA. Thus, many schools rely on the SAT as a fair metric by which to judge a student's abilities against another. And this is no minor detail. As a result of the intensely competitive nature of the application process for the best schools, an impressive SAT score is all the more desirable, because a superior test score could potentially provide an applicant with that extra edge needed to prove successful.

Unfortunately or not, any student seriously considering any of the most prestigious universities in the United States must recognize the SAT as an important element of the application process. True, a less-than-outstanding SAT score will not necessarily nullify an applicant's chances of acceptance, since other factors including GPA, extracurricular activities, and application essays are also considered. However, an outstanding score certainly helps.

For each of the three areas (reading, writing, and mathematical reasoning) tested by the SAT, a score (ranging from 200 to 800) is determined, giving a maximum possible total score of 2400. The median score for each of the three areas is always 500, and thus the median total score on the SAT is always 1500.

In March 2005, the format of the SAT changed significantly. The analogies section, often thought of as the most difficult part of the test, has been removed. A new writing section has been added, consisting of an essay-writing component and multiple-choice grammar questions. The math section no longer contains quantitative comparison questions, yet now tests material that was not previously covered by the SAT.

The good news is that the changes made to the SAT in March 2005 have made significant improvement a more achievable goal. Armed with serious diligence and commitment, you have a greater chance than ever before to do well on the SAT. And we at Ivy Global are prepared to equip you with the skills and strategies needed to maximize your results.

## **What is the format of the SAT?**

The SAT is 3 hours and 45 minutes long. It is composed of 10 sections:

- one 25-minute essay-writing section
- five 25-minute multiple-choice sections
  - o two mathematical reasoning

- two critical reading
- one writing skills
- two 20-minute multiple-choice sections
  - one mathematical reasoning
  - one critical reading
- one 10-minute multiple-choice writing skills section
- one 25-minute multiple-choice experimental section (not graded)
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These 10 sections, along with two 10-minute breaks, compose the whole of the SAT.

### **How can I improve my SAT score?**

It is a common misconception that SAT scores can be dramatically improved by simply enrolling in an after-school class or summer program. In reality, score improvement occurs only after consistent practicing and learning concepts over a long period of time. The key to raising SAT scores is a *long-term strategy*.

As the SAT evaluates the students according to three separate areas, the most effective form of SAT preparation is that which recognizes and distinguishes the specific skills and knowledge needed for each area of the test. The following provides a brief introduction to the studying methods and techniques that can effectively improve one's results on the SAT.

### **When should I start studying?**

Ideally, a student should start studying in grade 9. At this age, we typically recommend students to focus on building vocabulary and improving essay writing skills.

To obtain scores of 700+ in critical reading, students need to learn over 5000 new vocabulary words. By starting in grade 9, students can memorize the words at a comfortable pace of 5-10 words per day.

### **Critical Reading**

1. **Read sophisticated material.** Most SAT study manuals will provide a sample list of the type of books that appear most frequently as Critical Reading passages. Particularly for younger students, in grades 7-9 or even lower, high-level reading can produce drastic improvement on the SAT. Of course, picking up *Great Expectations* two days before the SAT will do little, if anything, in terms of improving your score. However, if a student develops the habit of reading challenging material early on, the possibilities are limitless.

2. **Build your vocabulary.** All too often, test-takers stumble during Critical Reading sections because they do not know the meaning of words contained in the answer options. To avoid this

unfortunate situation, vocabulary-building must be included as an integral part of SAT preparation. For most students, flash cards prove most effective as a method of memorizing words. However, flash cards, and all other forms of vocabulary-building, only prove effective when they are employed regularly and frequently.

**3. Practice summarizing.** Some of the most challenging Critical Reading questions ask the reader to describe the tone of the passage or the intention of the author. Such questions test the reader's ability to recognize the more subtle underlying mood or message behind the words. To improve your ability to judge tone and intention, the following technique proves useful. While reading sophisticated material (see Tip #1 above), stop every few paragraphs to mentally summarize the main points, opinions, and feelings that have just been conveyed. This will allow you to mentally train yourself to keep attuned to the subtleties of feeling and purpose that are hidden in all high-level writing.

**4. Improve your memory.** Too many test-takers waste precious minutes searching for particular words, phrases, or sentences in longer passages. In order to shave off precious time and improve your test-taking efficiency, you must train your memory. Just as you did in order to practice summarizing (see Tip #3 above), pause every few paragraphs while reading. Then, without looking at the book, try to describe what you have just read, as specifically as possible. Do you remember characters' names, personalities, and appearances? Do you remember how the plot has developed? Has the narrator suggested anything that reveals his own personal opinion about the situation? By answering questions such as these, and training yourself to remember minor details and nuances in the text, you will strengthen your memory in a way that will prove extremely beneficial when you write your next SAT.

## Writing

**1. Develop an essay template.** Take advantage of the fact that you only have to write one essay during the SAT. For example, what do you find to be the easiest technique to use to form an interesting introduction: rhetorical questions, a quote, or a shocking statement? Choose one and stick to it. When practicing writing essays (see Tip #5 below), never stray from your chosen template! You will then enter the SAT testroom with a tried-and-true format for writing rapid essays.

**2. and 3. Build your vocabulary. Read sophisticated material.** These two study techniques prove effective in improving results for both the Critical Reading and Writing sections.

**4. Drill yourself on grammar rules.** Using flashcards, you can effectively memorize the most common grammar rules and concepts that will appear in Writing questions. On the front of the cards, write sample SAT Writing questions. On the back of the cards, write the answers along with a very brief explanation. Keep these flashcards (along with the vocabulary cards) with you at all times, and review whenever you have a few minutes to spare.

**5. Practice writing 25-minute essays.** Practice is of course an integral part of preparation for all

three subject areas, but considering the particularly rigorous time constraints on the essay-writing section, practice is invaluable here. By practicing diligently, you will soon enough be able to write a substantive essay in the short 25-minute timeframe, with a couple minutes left to review your work and make last-minute changes.

## **Math**

1. **Drill, drill, drill.** Students improve their SAT Math performance primarily as a result of tireless practice. Compared with the Critical Reading and Writing sections, score improvement in Math is generally easier to come by. The key is to master your understanding of a concept, and then challenge that understanding by practicing that concept again and again.
2. **Practice writing under test conditions.** Like with the 25-minute essay writing, the Math section proves challenging in part because of the time constraints. Therefore, it is important to adhere strictly to the specified time limits while studying.
3. **Review your errors.** Always go back to any questions you've done incorrectly, and ensure that you understand where you've erred. Self-review is a critical part of the improvement process, both for the SAT and in life!

## **Resources**

### **The Best SAT Study Manuals**

With so many manuals out there, choosing one can prove to be a daunting task. The following are some of the manuals that have proven most effective. The general manuals provide a comprehensive introduction to all parts of the SAT, while the specific manuals focus on one particular area or another.

### **What are the best study materials?**

The best study guide is *The Official SAT Study Guide* by the College Board. It is the only guide with actual SAT questions from past exams and most closely resembles the test students will take. Barron's, McGraw Hill, Kaplan and Princeton Review also serve as useful supplementary study material. We recommend younger students (Grade 8-9) to use Kaplan and older students (grade 10-12) to use Barron's and McGraw Hill. PrepMe.com is the best online tool for SAT preparation.

### **Other Guides**

- 11 Practice Tests for the SAT and PSAT (Princeton Review)
- How to Prepare for the SAT (Barron's)
- SAT 2400: Aiming for the Perfect Score (Barron's)

SAT I Second Edition (McGraw Hill)

**Specific**

Critical Reading Workbook for the SAT (Barron's)

Conquering the New SAT Writing (McGraw-Hill)

Math Workbook for the SAT (Barron's)

SAT Math Workbook (Kaplan)