

## Tips on Acing the SAT

*Written by 1550+ scorers!*

### Overview

As you know, the SAT consists of 4 main sections: Reading, Writing, Math (No calculator), and Math (Calculator). However, it is important to note that there is a 5th section as well, which could consist of content from any one of the previous sections. This section does not count for your score, so don't worry!

- ❖ You **DO NOT** need to buy costly textbooks to achieve a high score — **use Khan Academy instead!**
- ❖ Start off by taking a timed practice test on Khan Academy to get a baseline of your score. After doing that, move on to targeted practice, using the timed mini-sections to help review
  - If you've already taken the SAT, you can also import your score to get the baseline
- ❖ **Study a little every day**, instead of all at once
  - Do one reading or writing passage a day (time it if you like) and a few math questions
- ❖ Remember that every question is worth the same amount of points no matter the difficulty
  - **If you get stuck on a question, MOVE ON.** It's not worth it to spend all your time on one question
- ❖ In terms of a timeline, plan to take the SAT the **summer after sophomore year** or the fall of junior year. This gives you ample time to retake the test if needed.
- ❖ However, you should still **aim to just take the test once**. Don't slack off studying because you *could* take it again, try to do your best the first time.
- ❖ To find your target score, look at the average SAT scores of the colleges that interest you. Aim to score in **at least the 50th percentile** (75th percentile ideally) for those schools. Also, check if your school is score-choice. If it's not, you will want to try to only take the test once, as all your scores will be reported

Test	Total time	Pacing guide
Math (calculator)	55 min.	87 seconds per question
Math (no calculator)	25 min.	75 seconds per question
Writing	35 min.	48 seconds per question
Reading	65 min.	13 minutes per passage

*Khan Academy*

## **Reading Section**

- ❖ This may sound like a weird tip, but trust me, it works. Pretend to **be interested** in the passages that you're reading. If you approach the passages with a **positive mindset**, you're more likely to read them closely and understand the content
- ❖ Fictional passages always have a **shift in tone**. Look for this as you are reading.
- ❖ For **paired passages**, try using the following process:
  - Read Passage 1
  - Answer Passage 1 Questions
  - Read Passage 2
  - Answer Passage 2 Questions
  - Answer Synthesis Questions
- ❖ A variety of questions are linked, in which the first question is a general close reading question and the second question asks you to **"Find The Evidence"** from the text to support your answer. If you're having trouble answering the first question, you can always go to the second question, locate the pieces of evidence in the passage, and **work backward** to get your answer.
- ❖ There is evidence in the passage for every correct answer. Try to find something in the passage that supports your answer
  - Don't read into what is being implied or what *could* be correct - it's all explicit evidence
  - Do your best not to bring in outside information (i.e. if you know a lot about the subject of the passage, set that aside)
- ❖ Some questions will have multiple answer choices with evidence in the passage. Make sure your answer is also **relevant to the question**.

## **Writing Section**

- ❖ The **shortest answer** is frequently the right one. Don't take this too far, but if you're stuck, it may point you in the right direction
- ❖ Like math, the writing section includes questions that **follow a similar pattern**. Some of the commonly tested concepts include the following:
  - *Noun/verb agreement*
    - Ignore prepositional phrases (e.g. Each of the men is working - "of the men" is irrelevant here, "each" is all that matters for agreement)
    - Pay attention to parallel construction
  - *Use of conjunctions*
    - Its' is NOT A WORD
  - *Punctuation*
    - Semicolons separate two INDEPENDENT clauses. If the sentence wouldn't stand on its own, you can't use a semicolon. Usually, a semicolon is used instead of a period if the two sentences are very closely connected in subject

- Colons are used for expanded definitions or to introduce a list. They MUST be preceded by an independent clause
- SAT questions don't typically ask about comma usage
- ❖ If you have a question about a grammar concept, feel free to ask your English teacher!

### **Math Section**

- ❖ Know how to **use your calculator effectively** (and take practice tests with the calculator you'll be using!)
  - The current calculator update (legal on the SAT!) includes shortcuts for solving linear equations, finding the roots of circle equations, etc., so make sure to use this wisely.
  - Remember that you don't have to use a calculator for every calculator active question - sometimes it's faster not to use one
- ❖ The SAT math questions often **follow the same pattern as the practice questions**, since they're meant to test the same concepts. These concepts include, but are not limited to the following (source: [blog.prepscholar.com](http://blog.prepscholar.com)):
  - *Solving quadratic equations*
  - *Interpreting nonlinear expressions*
  - *Quadratic and exponential word problems*
  - *Radicals and rational exponents*
  - *Operations with rational expressions and polynomials*
  - *Polynomial factors and graphs*
  - *Nonlinear equation graphs*
  - *Linear and quadratic systems*
  - *Structure in expressions*
  - *Isolating quantities*
  - *Functions*
- ❖ There's a reason why most top colleges have a higher average score in math than in reading/writing – it is **easier to improve** on the math section than the reading section, since this section is way more predictable. Regular practice on this section will definitely help improve your score.

### **Other Online FREE Resources**

<https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/sat>  
<https://satsuite.collegeboard.org/sat/practice-preparation/sat-study-guide>  
<https://blog.prepscholar.com/whats-actually-tested-on-sat-math-topics>  
<https://blog.prepscholar.com/whats-actually-tested-on-sat-reading-skills>  
<https://blog.prepscholar.com/whats-actually-tested-on-sat-writing-grammar-and-questions>  
<https://www.cracksat.net/sat-downloads/>

*Good Luck! The SAT seems a lot more daunting than it really is. As long as you practice effectively and know the test well, you'll be good to go!*