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“Don’t pick up your pencil until you are told. Clearly fill in the bubbles on your answer sheet.”

If it’s been awhile since you’ve heard those instructions, or if even the smell of No. 2 pencil shavings makes you queasy, you might want to take an SAT test prep course or take a practice test or two online before you officially take your seat at an exam site.

Not all college admissions offices require SAT scores, and some insist they don’t look at scores unless the selection of candidates is a close call. Others require that first-time freshman applicants must submit SAT or ACT scores, including the writing portion of the exam.

For those who don’t know, the new SAT debuted in March and covers reading, writing, language and math, with an optional essay, which some colleges require. Each subject test is multiple-choice with no penalty for wrong answers. That’s a change from previous years. Knowing how to guess wisely is helpful because if you can eliminate two possible answers, you have a 50-50 chance of getting the correct answer.

There’s never been a reason to cram for the SATs. In fact, the new test was designed to focus more on the skills and knowledge that you learned in high school, as well as the skills you will need to succeed in college, according to the College Board, the organization that creates

and administers the test.

If you’re unclear what type of material you learned in high school that may be useful in college, you can get a good idea by looking at sample questions on the College Board’s website, collegereadiness.collegeboard.org.

On exam day, which is offered seven times a year, you may be able to improve your score by following these tips, provided by the College Board:

- Read carefully. Consider all the choices in each question before deciding your answer.
- Answer the easy questions first. Questions are generally ordered from easiest to hardest.
- Eliminate answer choices that you know are wrong. Cross them out in your test booklet so that you can clearly see which choices are left.
- Keep your answer sheet neat. If the machine that scores your answer sheet can’t distinguish your markings, it will consider the question unanswered. Erase carefully.
- Use your test booklet as scrap paper. What you write in the booklet will not affect your score.
- Circle the questions you skipped in your booklet. This will help you keep track so you can come back.
- Work at an even, steady pace. Practice helps you develop a sense of timing. Your goal is to spend time on questions you are most likely to answer correctly. ■



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