



A+ Test Prep and Tutoring Newsletter

February, 2010

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Featured Student: Will Kuzma of Council Rock North HS

A+ Test Prep and Tutoring is very proud to report that one of our students, Will Kuzma, received a nearly perfect score of 2330 (out of a possible 2400 points) on the June 2009 SAT. This represents a 300 point increase from his October 2008 PSAT score! Will, who is a senior at Council Rock North High School, got a 760 in Critical Reading, a perfect score of 800 in Math, and a 770 in Writing.

Will was tutored by Bob Roach in Math and by Brian Kirchner in Verbal who both commented on how diligent their student was--he was very engaged during their tutoring sessions and was eager to learn. Will worked through the A+ curriculum so quickly, in fact, that Bob had to draw on additional math test prep material normally reserved for students who take refresher classes! Will credits the sheer repetition of working through all types of SAT questions, both in homework and on practice tests, to his being so prepared on test day. He said "there were no surprises."

Will applied early decision and was accepted to Dartmouth College where he plans to study foreign languages and political science. In the meantime, he is enjoying his senior year at

Is Your School Interested in Offering a Test Prep Course?



Since 1992 A+ Test Prep has offered PSAT, SAT, ACT, SSAT, and ISEE test preparation courses at schools throughout the Delaware Valley.

We also offer free proctored ACT and SAT exams at local schools upon request.

For more information please contact Daniel Ascher, M.Ed. at 215.886.9188.

Free Proctored SAT Practice Exam

Council Rock North where he is an officer of both the Spanish Honor Society and the French Club, a member of the National Honor Society and the Science National Honor Society, and participates in the model United Nations program.

Congratulations to Will on his outstanding SAT scores (and kudos to his tutors as well), and continued success at Dartmouth and beyond!



Websites that Follow Trends in College Admissions



The landscape of college admissions has been changing rapidly over the last few years, and it can seem daunting for high school students (and their parents) who are about to begin their college quest to familiarize themselves with the admissions process. Where

to begin?

Two revered publications, *The New York Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal* devote a portion of their websites to covering current practices and emerging trends in the college admissions process.

Here are the links to their college admissions related websites:

<http://thechoice.blogs.nytimes.com>

www.wsj.unigo.com

Rethinking the Goals of Elementary School



Mark your calendars! The inclement weather on February 6, 2010 caused us to cancel our free, no-obligation, proctored SAT practice exams. The new date is March 6, 2010. The exam is open to current students and to members of the community.

Location:

Penn Wynne Library
130 Overbrook Parkway
Wynnewood, PA 19096

SAT Proctored Practice Exam
Saturday, March 6, 2010, 10:00 AM-2:15 PM

This is a great opportunity for students to take the SAT under actual test-like conditions prior to sitting for the "real" thing. Students will receive a detailed score report which includes an analysis of their strengths and weaknesses on the exam.

These tests are offered by A+ for free, on a no-obligation basis--no strings attached!

Space is limited, though, so call our office today at 215.886.9188 or 610.520.0537 to register.

The Myth of Multitasking





Due to the "No Child Left Behind" legislation enacted in 2002, so much emphasis is placed on preparing today's students for testing that, unfortunately, social and analytical skills sometimes get lost in the shuffle. State testing is now mandatory in the public school system to ensure that all students have successfully acquired certain basic skills. Consequently, teachers are often forced to "teach to the test," taking time away from the regular curriculum. Public schools are rated and receive federal funding on the basis of student test scores.

Although state testing occurs at various grade levels, it has had a strangling effect on elementary school education in particular. This test-driven frenzy is frustrating to both teacher and student alike and runs counter to the way in which current research indicates young children actually develop and learn concepts. In a recent *New York Times* Op-Ed piece, Susan Engel, a senior lecturer in psychology and director of the teaching program at Williams College, addresses the flaws of this test-centered curriculum and suggests ways in which the curriculum can be better adapted to meet the developmental needs of our children in these formative years.

Engel underscores the importance of reading in all its forms--hearing stories read aloud, reading aloud to others, telling stories to each other, and reading independently. Writing is also key--children should spend time writing about things that are meaningful to them such as letters, stories, and magazine articles. Practice of computation, enjoying sustained conversations, having extended play time, and strengthening collaborative skills such as listening to one another and cooperating are also essential skills, according to Engel.

Specifically, she maintains that students should have mastered the following once they finish elementary school: "They should be able to read a chapter book, write a story and a compelling essay; know how to add, subtract, divide and multiply numbers; detect patterns in complex phenomena; use evidence to

We are a society of multitaskers who take pride in our ability to accomplish several things at once. Indeed, we even feel exhilarated by our ability to do so. Teenagers research a project on-line while instant messaging their friends and listening to music. Business people constantly check their smartphones for email and send or answer text messages in the middle of business meetings. Parents talk on their cell phones and sip coffee while chauffeuring their children from activity to activity.

But this shifting of attention from one task to another often gives us a false sense of competence, argues Clifford I. Nass, Professor of Psychology at Stanford University. "Heavy multitaskers are often extremely confident in their abilities." This confidence is not merited, though, according to the results of a study Nass and two colleagues performed on some self-described multitaskers. Much to Nass's surprise, the multitaskers performed far worse on cognitive and memory tasks that involved distraction than their counterparts who preferred focusing on one task at a time. Nass thought that the busy bees would perform better at least in some aspects of the test, but the results of the study indicated otherwise.

Psychologists have known for some time that under optimal conditions the human mind's ability to juggle facts and perform mental operations is limited to approximately 7 units (hence, the reasoning behind the 7-digit phone number). Generally speaking, we struggle to repeat new information that exceeds 7 units and so we must guess or estimate. Other factors such as fatigue or anxiety only further degrade our memory.

The ability to manage our attention and filter out distractions plays an important role in encoding information into long-term memory. Karin Foerle of Columbia University conducted an interesting experiment in 2006 that suggests that distraction during learning can be harmful, even if the distraction doesn't seem to impede students' immediate performance on their tasks. Her experiment involved having students predict weather based on cues that they learned over many computer trials. During one of the computer trainings, she introduced an additional task--the students had to also count musical tones while forecasting. Adding this musical chore did not at first seem to harm the students' performance--their forecasts were almost as accurate as those made when there were no distractions. However, when the students were asked later to summarize the general probabilistic rules for that trial (for example, a triangle was associated with

support an opinion; be part of a group of people who are not their family; and engage in an exchange of ideas in conversation. If all elementary school students mastered these abilities, they would be prepared to learn almost anything in high school and college." Engel is decidedly not a fan of rote memorization of facts and formulas because research shows that children "construct knowledge; they don't swallow it."

In sum, Engel believes that our educational system needs to shift its focus away from preparing our elementary school children to do well in the short-term on tests. Rather, she asserts, we should cultivate social and analytical skills that will prepare our children to do well in the long-term, both in higher education and in life. [Click here](#) to read the entire *New York Times* Op-Ed piece by Susan Engel.

sunshine 80% of the time), they fared far worse than they did on the undistracted trials.

Foerde asserts that the distracted students learned the weather rules by "habit memory," but when undistracted they learned the rules through what is known as a declarative memory system. These findings are important for educators--information stored in declarative memory is more flexible, says Foerde, and people are more likely to be able to draw analogies and extrapolate from it. "If you just look at performance on the main task, you might not see these differences," Foerde says. "But when you're teaching, you would like to see more than simple retention of the information that you're providing people. You'd like to see some evidence that they can use their information in new ways."

The findings of these psychologists suggest that we should reconsider our multitasking ways. Upon closer examination, the habit that makes us feel so competent and efficient comes at a cost. For more information about the downside of multitasking, see David Glenn's "[Divided Attention](#)" from [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#) from which this article was drawn.

Thank you for your interest in A+ and our newsletter. Feel free to contact us at 215.886.9188 or on the web at www.aplustutoring.com.

And don't forget to visit the [A+ Blog](#), which is updated weekly with articles relating to a variety of education-related topics including college admissions, test prep, learning disabilities, reading skills, etc.

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