



Tip Sheet for Success on the SAT

General Tips

- You will most likely take the SAT more than once, so think of your first time taking the real test as an opportunity for practice, not the end-all, be-all. This approach will alleviate much stress.
- Plan to start your test prep program at least 3 or 4 months prior to your chosen test date.
- On multiple-choice questions, only guess when you can eliminate at least two choices. Random guessing will cost you points since there is a $\frac{1}{4}$ -point penalty for each wrong answer. On math grid-ins, though, feel free to guess if you don't know the answer since there is no guessing penalty associated with grid-ins.
- Pace yourself but keep moving. If you start to stall on a question, move along. Take a 30-second break in the middle of a section to calm down and focus on breathing; this will be more helpful than just powering through frantically.
- Trust your gut. It may seem scary to choose "E" (no error), but sometimes that really is the right answer. If you can narrow the answer down to 2 or 3 choices, but can't narrow it down to just one, go with your instinct, guess, and move on. Don't waste time.
- Write all over your test booklet. Cross out wrong answers, underline, and write in the margins.
- All questions have equal value. Each question is worth 1 point, so when a difficult question slows you down, go back to it at the end of the section if time allows. Spend most of your time racking up points on the easy and medium items.
- When doing practice tests at home, try to duplicate actual test conditions as much as possible. Go to a quiet place alone, time the sections properly, use the same calculator you'll be bringing to the test, and take deep breaths between sections.
- Unprepared SAT performances can rattle a student's confidence unnecessarily, so take the online SAT practice test on the College Board website, register for the *SAT Question of the Day*, and consider a test prep program.
- College Board's *Score Choice* allows you to send or omit your scores for a particular test (all scores from one sitting are reported). Check with indiv. colleges on score reporting requirements.
- Time frame for taking the tests: PSAT in October of 11th grade; 1st SAT in January or March of 11th grade; 2nd SAT in March, May, or June of 11th grade; 3rd SAT in October of 12th grade.
- Slow down and answer fewer questions. In most cases you can significantly improve your score by NOT answering every question.



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Math Tips

- While topics range from basic arithmetic to Algebra II, the amount of math required on any one topic is limited. Narrow your focus to only those specific topics covered on the SAT.
- While using process of elimination on math questions, ask yourself: *Could the answer be negative? Should it be large or small?* This will improve your speed on the exam by not allowing you to be distracted by answers that don't make sense.

Critical Reading and Grammar Tips

- Reading comprehension is 70% of your reading score. Underline key words and phrases in reading passages. Easy questions may appear at the end, so read and consider every reading question. Be an active, involved reader!
- Anticipate/predict the answer in sentence completions and grammar questions. Predict a word that will work in the blank, or predict a solution to the grammar problem, and then look for an answer close to your prediction.
- Do not select any answer that you cannot support with proof from the text of the reading passage.
- Do not “throw out” an answer too fast; keep possible answers in the running as “maybes.”
- The most common grammar and writing errors are made with pronouns, verb tense, idioms, subject-verb agreement, conjunctions, illogical comparisons, sentence fragments, compound sentences, adjectives vs. adverbs, and run-on sentences.

Essay Tips

- Essays – use specific detailed examples from books, movies, history, science, sports, current events, and personal anecdotes to support your thesis. Prepare a range of examples in advance. Personal examples are not only acceptable, but can make your essay interesting and unique.
- Take a few minutes to read the prompt 2 to 3 times in order to fully understand the question. Underline key words or phrases in the prompt, determine your position, and then make a basic outline to follow instead of just diving right in. These steps will save time in the long run and ensure that you are answering the prompt logically and soundly.