

Studying by Learning by Doing

The SAT and the ACT

Well, juniors, I think the PSAT has shown you the true power of the SAT and its demands that you study all year for this life-defining test. Let me show you how to learn the material on this test—by actually taking the test *a lot*.

Make your place and time to study

Keep everything important in reach. Especially food. This includes scrap paper, pencils, and calculator. Keep yourself in the study *zone* by staying focused in your place, not needing to leave.

Keep everything distracting far away. Isolate yourself from your phone, friends, and family.

Listen to consistent noise. First, isolate yourself from outside sounds with static white noise (with a website like *myNoise*) wearing headphones. At the same time, play instrumental music with a consistent beat (you can find a station on *Pandora* or *Google Play Music*) to keep track of time. However, if you don't enjoy it, switch to something you love—being happy is more important here.

Work in 25-minute blocks; then take a 5–10 minute break. You can only stay focused on one thing for that long, so switch subjects (reading, writing, mathematics) at this time. Just have a fun break: break all of these rules here. Play a game. Eat. Talk to friends. Then jump back in to studying.

Use your resources: Khan Academy

khanacademy.com has it all: SAT interactive practice, SAT practice tests, and general study tips.

Create an account. On the website, click *Start Learning Now*, then choose *Sign in with Gmail* if you have one (otherwise *Sign up with email* and follow that).

Find the SAT dashboard. In the top left of the screen, click *Subjects* ▼, then under *Test Prep* choose *SAT*. Now, at the top of the screen you have the navigation bar for *Practice*, *Tips and Strategies*, and *Full Tests*.

Practice. Choose *Practice* on the navigation bar and then *Reading & Writing* below it; this section comes first on the real test, so we do it first. Follow the website's recommendations and choose *Practice this skill*. Your ultimate goal is to have 4/4 strength bars on every skill for both Reading & Writing and Math. (include screenshot of the bars)

Timed mini-section: Once you practice the (usually) 3 weak skills, you unlock a timed mini-section. This is a timed (usually 9 or 13 minute) excerpt of questions from the real test. Once you finish, you should reach the end of the 25-minute study block. Take a break and click to the *Math* side.

Practice again. Do the timed mini-section again. For math this time. If you'd rather, scroll down to the list of skills and practice whichever skill you want to individually. You're done for this session!

Read notes and watch videos about the "new SAT" and other studying and testing tips. Do this by clicking *Tips and Strategies* on the navigation bar. This section covers everything I couldn't on this single piece of paper.

Take a full SAT. On the navigation bar, choose *Full Tests*. It takes 3 hours, and you get one 10-minute break after Writing and Language. Practice test 1 is the only test unlocked at the beginning. Take it: click *Start this session*. Good luck.

Use your resources: phone apps

On phones, the best option for studying is still Khan Academy's *website* (because the app does not have the SAT section), but there are easier, faster apps to use.

Daily Practice for the New SAT: The CollegeBoard (y'know, the group that makes the SAT) made this app that does it exactly what it sounds like: it gives you a real SAT question every day. You can download old questions for the two sections of the

Ready4 SAT / ACT: This app provides progressive difficulty for studying.

Your test timeline

November 16	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> You took the PSAT. Good job.
Thanksgiving break	Here's an excuse to get away from your family: <input type="checkbox"/> Take practice exam 1.
Christmas break	<input type="checkbox"/> Take practice exam 2. <input type="checkbox"/> Retake practice exam 1 to see how you've improved.
Winter break	<input type="checkbox"/> Take practice exam 3. <input type="checkbox"/> Retake practice exam 2.
Spring break	<input type="checkbox"/> Take practice exam 4. Expect this score on test day.
April 8, 2017 (Saturday)	<input type="checkbox"/> Take the ACT (\$56 with essay).
April 11, 2017 (Tuesday)	<input type="checkbox"/> Take the SAT. Recycle this paper if you plan not to retake either test.
Any time	For extra practice, or if you plan to retake, take <input type="checkbox"/> exam 5 and <input type="checkbox"/> exam 6.

My concerns:

1. Reader can't connect: I don't think people will actually want to read this or connect with me, the author, as a person. The sarcasm doesn't help. Students probably won't read it, or, if they do read it, will not enjoy it and therefore never read it again. The intro is lame and shows that I can't connect with the reader either.
2. Too authoritarian: I tell them to do something without offering a reason or encouraging them to investigate beyond what I've told them
3. I don't talk about studying for the ACT enough, if at all, nor why I recommend taking it in the first place.
4. I don't say the PSAT is the SAT without hard questions or essay.
5. Too basic: This is just a guide on how to use a website. The "place and time to study" section has no valuable information.
6. The methodology (theory) and practice (application) sections should be intertwined but I don't suggest that they are strongly enough.
7. The test timeline section is overwhelming, but I like that I encourage students to keep this paper by checking off the boxes throughout the year.
8. Unclear purpose: The sections can be rearranged without issue (showing that they are not connected or logically ordered) or divided into separate papers that can be filled on that particular topic. That is to say, this piece looks like a collection of excerpts from other papers.
9. I like the title but I don't effectively connect it to the methodology for studying I describe.

Thank you.

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