

SAT Cheat Sheet

Reading

Do the passages in the order you feel most comfortable.

Look at the introduction in italics. Identify the topic. Ask what does the author want me to know about this topic?

Look for your “signposts” as you read - contrast words (but, yet, however, although, despite); italics; and colons, dashes. Underline.

Think about the author’s attitude toward the topic. Is it positive, negative or neutral? If it’s positive, we can rule out negative or neutral answer choices.

Watch for extreme words or phrases on NON-FICTION texts; these words can also be positive.

When reading fiction, don’t rule out extreme words. An answer choice that has a word like *despicable* might be the right answer.

Function or purpose questions. Ask yourself *why* the author is mentioning this fact or writing this piece.

Rhetorical strategy questions. Remember your three shortcuts: Anecdote, rhetorical questions and direct citations/quotations.

Structure questions. Look for contrast words; they typically indicate a shift in the paragraph or passage. What’s different between what came before and what came after?

Look for evidence of disagreement; again, look for contrast words. If you don’t see any, cross out the answer that indicates disagreement. Look for evidence of uncertainty, your M-words (may, maybe, might). Then rule out an answer that indicates certainty; for example, an assertion or bold statement.

Vocabulary

Think about secondary meanings of words, and how they are used in the sentence. A word like *exploit* has a negative connotation, but it may be used positively in the sentence in question.

If you choose a word that doesn't quite fit, it's probably not the right answer. Go with the unfamiliar word.

Try positive-negative strategy. For example, if the word is used in a positive way, rule out negative answer choices.

Writing

General rule: Shorter is better, *but there are always exceptions*. The SAT prefers active to passive voice. *The dog bit the man*, not *the man was bitten by the dog*.

Punctuation

You must be able to distinguish a fragment from a sentence. A fragment will be missing something vital, usually a subject.

Remember that commas are used with fragments, and periods, semicolons and colons are used with complete thoughts.

Your W-words (who, whom, which, when, where) usually get commas on the test.

Grammar

The Big 3, the most tested areas, are subject-verb agreement, verb tenses and pronoun-antecedent agreement. Make sure you know all the rules.

Subject-verb

There may be *more than one subject*; therefore, the verb is plural.

Verbs may come before subjects.

Watch for and ignore prepositional phrases and non-essential clauses. They are intended to keep you from identifying the subject.

Tenses

The golden rule is the SAT likes consistency, meaning most of the time tenses should be similar.

You should know past-perfect and present-perfect tenses. Only rarely are these tenses the correct answer, but they do appear as answer choices.

Pronoun-antecedent

Each, everybody, everyone, somebody, someone, anybody, anyone are singular.

Collective nouns are singular. Yes, a *jury* or *team* can be plural when divided, but the SAT will only test you on whether you know it's singular.

Make sure pronouns are consistent – *you/you, not you/she*.

Rhetoric

Diction-Register

Be able to recognize differences between similar sounding words. *Persecute/prosecute, infer-inform*.

For register questions, remember that the correct word will neither be too informal nor too formal.

Transitions

They come in three categories: continuers, contradictors and cause-effect. A useful strategy is to block off the original answer choice and think about the relationship between the clauses.

Add or delete questions.

Look at sentence carefully. Is there something mentioned that would connect it to another sentence? With, delete questions, there's usually something *off* about the particular sentence. It may be too general or has nothing to do with the topic of the paragraph.

Sentence Order & Sentence Setup questions

Again, look at sentence carefully. Is there something mentioned that would connect it to another sentence? You must consider the sentence before and, in some cases, the sentence after.