

8 Secrets

To Improve Your SAT Score

By 50+ Points TODAY!

By Jessica Brondo

Founder and President of

The Edge
In College Preparation

Thanks so much for downloading your copy of 8 Secrets to Improve Your SAT Score 50+ points TODAY! Now, this isn't magic fairy dust, but it IS a group of practical strategies that really work instantaneously for score improvement. Now let's get to it:

1. Stop Guessing Blindly!

If you're anything like me, you hate admitting when you're wrong and you probably hate it even more when you don't know the answer to something. Well, I'm sorry to say, that unless you're getting perfect scores on the SAT already (in which case you should stop reading this and go do something fun), there are DEFINITELY going to be a bunch of questions that leave you clueless. Do NOT just blindly circle C because your silly friend told you to. Swallow your pride, stop being cocky and OMIT IT.

Now here's why: the SAT is a negative marking test. What might that be, you ask? It means that while you gain points for questions you get correct, you also LOSE points for questions you get wrong. Okay, sooooo? Well, that means that all your hard work on questions you're actually getting right could be ruined by throwing away points on questions you're blindly guessing on. Take a look:

Let's say there are ten questions you are unsure of. You can't eliminate ANY of the choices. So you follow your silly friend Sam's advice and bubble in C for all of them. If we do some simple probability, you have a 1 in 5 chance of answering those questions correctly (because there are 5 answer choices), so if there are ten questions, you will most likely get 2 questions correct and 8 questions wrong. To calculate your raw score, you receive 1 point for each of the 2 correct questions (2 points) and will lose $\frac{1}{4}$ of a point for each of the 8 questions you are getting wrong (-2 points). If we add those together, you have a big fat ZERO for your raw score. No bueno. There's got to be a better way!?! Why yes there is:

The Rule of 2:

The Rule of 2 should become one of your little tricks. Basically you want to remember that unless you can eliminate 2 answer choices through your crafty logical reasoning abilities, don't even think about answering that question. On those same 10 questions, let's say there was one question we had absolutely no clue, but the other 9 we could eliminate 2 answer choices.

We would get 0 points for the one question we omitted that we had no clue on, then on the other 9, we just upped our chances to a 1 in 3 shot of getting it correct, so on 9 questions we would get 3 correct and 6 wrong. This means we would get 3 points for the correct questions and would lose $\frac{1}{4}$ of a point for the other 6 (a total of 1.5 points), making our overall score in the positive at 1.5 points, which is where you want to be! And remember...these are just the questions you're having trouble with and you're STILL gaining points. We likey.

Now that you're on the getting free points for nothing band wagon, you're going to want to move on to Step #2:

2. Create a StratEDGEy Score and stick to it!

A StratEDGEy Score, in case you were wondering, is your goal score for each section of the test. Now people set these very differently. Don't get crazy and kill yourself by shooting for the stars right off the bat. Aiming for a perfect score as your first target score is in a word, futile [aka useless for those of you not studying your vocab lists]...UNLESS of course your starting score on each section is over a 700 (then shoot for the moon!). You want to pace yourself with your score improvement. Baby steps, buddy. Now a good rule of thumb in setting your target score is to shoot for 50 points more than your starting reading score, 150 points higher than your starting math score, and 100 points higher than your starting writing score. This in no way means that you can't go up more than this. This just means that this is how you want to start off. Theeeeeennnnnn once you hit those scores, bump it up to the next level, and the next, and the next, until you're an SAT rockstar getting perfect scores and working for The Edge.

So now that you have this magical target score, what next? Well, this is the big secret: once you have your target score you can stop answering certain questions on the test. WTF!?! Really? YES!!! Now for the most part, the questions on the SAT are arranged in order of easy to hard, so if you're only shooting for a 600, you don't have to waste your time on the last few questions in each section because you don't NEED to get those correct in order to get a 600. Those questions are just going to stress you out and waste valuable time that you could be using to check your other questions for careless errors.

We've designed handy tables of "StratEDGEy Numbers" that show you how many questions you need to get right in each section in order to hit certain goals. Just follow the appropriate table below in order to achieve your StratEDGEy Score. The table tells you which questions to answer in the section (usually the least difficult) *or* how many questions you can omit and still get your StratEDGEy score. The tables below explain which questions you should do in each section in order to hit your goal score:

550 (on each section)

Reading Section	Questions to Do	Math Section	Questions to Do	Writing Section	Questions to Do
24-question long	1-5, 9-12, 5 questions on the long passage	20-question	1-14	35-question	1-8, 12-23, 3 paragraph improvement questions
24-questions	1-3, 6-9, 7 questions on the long passages	18-question	1-4, 9-13	14-question	1-8
19-question	1-4, 6 questions on the long passages	16-question	1-8		

600 (on each section)

Reading Section	Questions to Do	Math Section	Questions to Do	Writing Section	Questions to Do
24-question long	1-6, 9-12, 7 questions on the long passage	20-question	1-16	35-question	1-9, 12-24, 4 paragraph improvement questions
24-questions	1-4, 6-9, 9 questions on the long passages	18-question	1-5, 9-14	14-question	1-10
19-question	1-5, 7 questions on the long passages	16-question	1-10		

650 (on each section)

Reading Section	Questions to Do	Math Section	Questions to Do	Writing Section	Questions to Do
24-question long	1-7, 9-12, 8 questions on the long passage	20-question	1-18	35-question	1-10, 12-25, 4 paragraph improvement questions
24-questions	1-4, 6-9, 11 questions on the long passages	18-question	1-6, 9-15	14-question	1-13
19-question	1-5, 9 questions on the long passages	16-question	1-12		

700 (on each section)

Reading Section	Questions to Do	Math Section	Questions to Do	Writing Section	Questions to Do
24-question long	1-7, 9-12, 10 questions on the long passage	20-question	1-19	35-question	1-10, 12-27, 4 paragraph improvement questions
24-questions	1-5, 6-9, 13 questions on the long passages	18-question	1-7, 9-17	14-question	1-14
19-question	1-5, 11 questions on the long passages	16-question	1-13		

750-800 (on each section)

If you're looking for top scores on each of the sections you should be answering most (or all in the case of a perfect score) of the questions in the section. For scores between 750 and 800, you should use your best judgment to omit anything that you have absolutely no idea how to answer, but if you can make an educated guess on a question, you should go for it.

Now for some specific tips for each section:

3. Bump Your Essay Score Up by At Least 1 Point!

Most of my students get really stressed out about the essay because, let's face it, who wants to be put on the spot to write a kickass essay in 25 minutes? No one. Writing is usually a process that takes time (or at least you pretend you spend a lot of time on your essay while you're chit chatting away on AIM and video chat...trust me, I know!), so it's a bit scary to think about writing a solid essay in 25 minutes. With these 4 steps, you can easily boost your essay score by at least 1 or 2 points, which translates into about 20-30 points on the writing section.

A) Do not re-write the question in your intro.

This just wastes your valuable time and will not add any points to your score. The graders know that any dum dum can copy a sentence, so don't think you're fooling anyone.

B) Always use 2 examples.

Not 1, not 3, 2! The question always states that you should use exampleS to support your argument, so if you are only using 1 example, you're actually not fully answering the question and if you are using 3 examples, you're probably not going to have enough time to fully develop each one, so stick to the magic number 2 and you'll be in the clear.

C) Incorporate variety.

The SAT readers love variety. Put yourself in their shoes. How would you feel after reading hundreds of essays on the SAME topic each day for over a week? Absolutely bored to tears. So give 'em a break and do something interesting in your essay. Stop using Martin Luther King as your example (yes, I know that he can be molded for use with any topic, but the SAT readers also know this as well). So unless you're having total memory loss and forgot ALL of your predetermined topics, try to pick something interesting to write about.

D) Learn to use a semi-colon and sophisticated vocabulary.

For some strange reason (I'm not sure why), semi-colons scare people. People either don't know how to use them, or (even worse), they don't know the difference between a semi-colon and a colon. FYI, a semi-colon looks like this--; and a colon looks like this--:. A semi-colon is like a weak period. You use it to separate two shorter sentences in order to make yourself sound sophisticated. It's guaranteed to impress, and probably sway the reader in your favor if she's wavering between two scores.

In terms of sophisticated vocabulary, you're going to want to pick out 2-3 "Wow Em Words" to incorporate into EVERY SAT essay. Yes it sounds dull, but if you make it a habit, you will surely reap the benefits. Think about neutral words that can be used in essays on a variety of topics. Some of my favorites are preclude (aka prevent) and moreover (basically a fancy way of saying "in addition to"). Now that you've written your kickass essay and squeezed out a couple of extra points, you're going to want to move on to the rest of the writing section, which brings us to:

4. Learn the top 3 grammar errors!

Scratch that. OWN them. Verb Errors, Pronoun Errors, and Parallelism Errors make up about 50% of the writing section, so if you can master these 3, you are in the clear.

A. VERB ERRORS

Subject-Verb Agreement

Every sentence has both a subject and a verb, and in order for the sentence to be grammatically correct, the subject and the verb must agree. For example, if you have a singular subject, you need a singular verb, and thus if you have a plural subject, you need a plural verb.

Take a look at this sentence:

The effect were bad.

Here we have a singular subject (the effect) and a plural verb. We can either write it as:

The effect was bad. OR

The effects were bad.

We just can't intermix singulars and plurals.

However, you might have noticed that this sentence was much easier than the sentences you might find on the SAT. One of the most common ways they try to trick you is by separating the subject from the verb. There are three ways that they can do this: insertion of a prepositional phrase, insertion of a subordinate clause, and putting the subject AFTER the verb. Be sure to watch out for these rascally tricks and make sure you always identify the subject and its verb and make sure they match!

Verb Tense Agreement

Another error you want to watch out for on the SAT is verb tense agreement. If the sentence starts out in past tense, it must stay in past tense throughout the sentence. The applies to verb in all tenses.

Even though the fans **gave up** hope on their team winning the World Series, the players **remain** confident.

Here, the sentence starts off in past tense; however, the verb describing the players is in present tense.

This sentence should be written:

Even though the fans gave up hope on their team winning the World Series, the players remained confident.

B. Pronoun Errors

Pronoun Agreement

Just as subjects and verbs have to agree, pronouns and nouns must agree. If you have a singular subject, you must have a singular pronoun, and if you have a plural subject, you must have a plural pronoun. For example:

The committee agreed that they were finished with the proposal.

Here, we have a singular subject (the committee) and a plural pronoun (they).

The revised sentence should read:

The committee agreed that **it** was finished with the revisions.

Pronoun Case

If you remember correctly, one of the fundamental rules was Pronoun Agreement. This rule involves using the correct pronoun. Below is a table displaying the three types of pronouns. It is important to check the pronoun whenever it appears in an SAT question.

Direct/Subject	Object	Possessive
I	Me	My
You	You	Your
He, She, It	Him, Her, It	His, Her, Its
We	Us	Our
They	Them	Their

The most common way the SAT will test your pronoun case knowledge is by putting a pronoun alongside a proper noun (usually a person's name). The best way to determine if you have the correct pronoun is to cover the other name and see if the sentence makes sense with just the pronoun. For example:

Mrs. Smith gave the test to Matt and I.

This sentence sounds OK the way it is; however, it's actually wrong. Cross out *Matt and*.

Mrs. Smith gave the test to ~~Matt and~~ I.

Now read the sentence. Not so good, huh? Doing it this way, we know that we have to change I to me.

*One common question that will appear that involves pronouns is a sentence starting with the word between. For example:

Between you and I, I'm not a big fan of your mom's cooking.

EVERYONE makes this mistake. You never never never say "Between you and I." It's "Between you and me." We know this because you would never say, "between we," you would say "between us." If you look back to our Pronoun table, you will see that me and us are in the same column, and I and we (the incorrect pronouns) are in the same column.

Shift of Pronoun (ONE v. YOU)

The last type of pronoun error concerns shift of pronoun, or an easier way of remembering it (ONE v. YOU)

For example,

Before **one** can drive, **you** need to pass a road test.

This sentence combines the pronouns one and you, and we just can't do that. We have to have matching pronouns.

We can either write this sentence:

Before one can drive, one needs to pass a road test. OR

Before you can drive, you need to pass a road test.

C. PARALLELISM

Parallelism is an important concept when you are writing sentences. It basically means that you have to stay consistent in every aspect of the sentence. The two major forms of parallelism that are tested on the SAT are: lists and comparisons.

Lists

When you list two or more verbs in a sentence, you have to make sure that they are all in the same format. For example:

Ashlee enjoys fishing, skating, and to play softball.

In this sentence, the first two items end in –ing,* but the third item is written as “to play.”** Do these seem to match? No, not at all. We clearly have a “situation” here, and we have to re-write the sentence as:

Ashlee enjoys fishing, skating, and playing softball.

*Fishing and skating in this sentence are functioning as nouns. We call these gerunds, when you have a word ending in –ing that is functioning as a noun. Lists can either be made up of gerunds (fishing, skating) OR

**Infinitives. To play is an infinitive. It is a verb in its most basic form. It hasn’t been conjugated yet.

Comparisons

(Words to look out for: THAN, UNLIKE, DIFFERED FROM)

The other form of parallelism tested on the SAT involves comparisons. When you are comparing two things in a sentence, you want to make sure that you logically express your idea. Take a look at this sentence:

Jessica’s waffles are tastier than Nicholas.

Now, reading this sentence, we can all understand that what we *meant* to say was:

Jessica’s waffles are tastier than Nicholas’s waffles.

However, grammatically, the first sentence is really saying that Nicholas isn't tasty. You always want to compare apples to apples and waffles to waffles, otherwise the sentence won't make sense grammatically.

*Logical comparisons are probably the most difficult error to catch because the sentence will make sense when you read it, but you really want to watch out for these comparisons. Once you know what to look for, they are easy to spot.

Now that you're officially ROCKING the writing section, we need to move on to Math, everyone's favorite.

5. RTFQ! (Read The **** Question)

Before we even move on to specific math techniques, you need to make sure you are Reading The Question (you figure out what the F stands for ;-). YES! It sounds oh so simple, and yet I can't even tell you how many students end up solving a question for x , when it clearly asks for $2x$. AND those sneaky devils at the College Board TOTALLY exploit this fact by putting the value of x as one of the answer choices, probably A. So you solve that $x = 5$, you rush to the answer choices, see answer choice (A) is 5 and BOOM GOES THE DYNAMITE, you think you're done. But noooooooo, you missed out on answer choice (E) 10, which is the correct answer because the question asks you for $2x$. It happens over and over and OVER again and is just a waste of points. Do NOT let yourself be "THAT GUY" and please, please, *please* READ THE QUESTION and double check what it's asking your for. Thanks ☺

6. If you see variables in a question, plug-in!

The most common way for students to make careless mistakes on the SAT involves questions with variables. Variables not only care students to make silly errors, but if solved the "traditional mathematical way" can often take wayyyyyy too long for anyone's good. An easy way to get around variable questions without creating equations is to plug in a number for the variable. You want to **avoid using 0, 1, or a number already used in the question** because they might make more than one answer choice correct.

Let's try this example:

(Ex) At a certain plant, each of m machines prints 6 newspapers every s seconds. If all machines work together but independently without interruption, how many minutes will it take to print an entire run of 18,000 newspapers?

So, if we make $m = 3$, and $s = 60$ (I picked 60 to make it easy on us since the question is asking how many minutes), then we know that each of 3 machines print 6 newspapers every 60 seconds or every minute.

If we want to know how many minutes it will take to print 18,000 newspapers, then we realize that a total of 18 newspapers (3 machines \times 6 newspapers) are being printed every minute, therefore if we divide 18,000 by 18, it will take 1000 minutes.

The answer choices will not contain the number 1000, because that is the answer that we arrived at using our numbers, but if we look at the following choices, we can figure out the correct choice by plugging in our numbers.

- (A) 180s/m
- (B) 50s/m
- (C) 50ms
- (D) ms/50
- (E) 300m/s

and we know that B is the correct choice $(50 \times 60)/3 = 1000$

Rather than wasting our time creating a complex equation to solve this, we can easily solve the question AND get the right answer in no time, which brings me to my next tip on timing for the reading section.

7. Don't Waste Your Time "Really Reading"

I can't tell you how many of my students come to me with an intense hatred for the reading section. I mean, let's be honest, most students don't really LOVE reading anything besides Funny or Die and Facebook Status Updates, BUT you're going to have to face the music and learn to at least tolerate reading at some point and it might as well be before you get to college. However, you DO NOT need to pour over the details of the passages on the SAT. Most students end up getting halfway through the passage only to start daydreaming about what they're going to be doing later that night or what they want to have for lunch and then forgetting everything they just read. So then they ultimately will start the entire passage over again and waste TONS of time in the process. You don't want to be that guy. Instead, you should focus on skimming the passage for trigger words. Triggers are words that either indicate a reemphasis of something or a contradictory transition to a new topic. Some examples of these are Therefore, However, Nevertheless, Despite, Because, And, etc. A full list can be found in the e-book, *The Edge for SAT Success*. You want to skim for these words, circle them, and then underline the sentences before and after them. These are the important sentences in each paragraph. By honing in on them, you not only stay focused while reading these somewhat boring passages, but you also absorb the important information to answer the questions.

8. Warm-Up Your Mind on the Day of the Test

I'm sure most of you have played some sport at some point in your life. If you think back to a game or even practice, you don't just start off sprinting, right? You gotta.....WARM YOURSELF UP. Otherwise you might get hurt. I want you to think about the SAT as the same thing as a sporting event. You have to be well-prepared for game day. Don't wake up late, skip breakfast, and go into the test having forgotten your calculator. Create a morning routine for yourself, and MAKE SURE YOU INCLUDE SOME WARM-UP PROBLEMS. If you're like most high school students, you're probably not a morning person and probably utilize Saturday mornings as a time to catch up on your zzzzz's. However, unfortunately, you'll be waking up pre-7 AM on test day most likely in order to get to school in the 8-8:30 AM range. Multiple studies have been conducted that prove that this is NOT the optimal time for students' brains to be functioning. And since I don't foresee the College Board pushing back the start time of the SAT, you might as well go into the test as prepared as possible. During your breakfast on the day of the test, gather up a few questions from each of the sections of the test and do them. Don't stress out about them, and don't go for the kill and give yourself all super tough ones. The idea is to get your mind working so that by the time you sit down to write your essay on the test, you are already in test-taking mode. I honestly wouldn't even bother checking to see if you answered them correctly, since that's not the point. The point is to just get you thinking, and reduce any test day anxiety you might have.

I hope that you enjoyed these tips and that you enjoy the other blog postings. For more tips and extensive SAT preparation materials, please check out our eBook store as well as our online course and tutoring options. Good luck and never hesitate to leave a comment or a question.

About the Founder of The Edge, Jessica Brondo:

Jessica began private tutoring while attending Glen Cove High School, from which she graduated Salutatorian. After graduating, Jessica went on to attend *Princeton University* where she not only continued her involvement with college preparation, but made meaningful contributions to the campus community. She majored in the Woodrow Wilson School for Public and International Affairs, from which she garnered the hallowed Susan M. Huffman *Senior Thesis Prize*, awarded to the senior with the best thesis, and the Women with Wings Award, bestowed upon the *25 most influential women at Princeton*. In addition to her academic achievements, she was also the President of the Organization of Women Leaders, the Founder and

President of Princeton Against Cancer Together, and the Women's Issues Liaison for the Undergraduate Student Government.

Upon graduation, she was appointed Site Director at a well-known SAT prep company based in the Tri-State area. While there, she directed three of the largest courses with nearly 500 students altogether. Additionally, she hired and trained the teachers for the courses, helped create new materials, and counseled and advised students and parents on various college preparation issues. Lastly, she is also a member of the ***Princeton University Alumni Schools Committee***, for which she interviews prospective students from New York City and Long Island.

Over the past seven years, Jessica has worked with close to 1,000 students both privately and in the classroom and has an ***average score improvement of 320 points*** on the ***SAT*** and ***5 points*** on the ***ACT***. Consistently attaining perfect scores on both the old and new format SATs, Jessica has developed the most ***innovative and comprehensive materials*** that will help students of all levels achieve their optimum scores and attend their dream schools.

In addition to her pursuits with The Edge, Jessica is also actively involved in several charitable and volunteer organizations. Jessica is the ***Chairperson of the NYC Princeton Class of '04 Alumni Organization*** and was recently elected to the Boards of Women's Choices and Friends of OWL, two alumni organizations at Princeton. Furthermore, she is an ***active fund-raiser and volunteer for V-Day***, an organization dedicated to ending violence against women and girls around the world and has recently launched a campaign to raise money to create the “City of Joy” for the women and girls of the Democratic Republic of Congo.