

A guide to the SAT

What are they?

The SAT is a multiple choice, computer-based exam used by US colleges and universities as part of the admissions process. It is broken down into two sections: Math and Reading and Writing. The Math section has 44 questions and is 70 minutes long, while the Reading and Writing section has 54 questions and is 64 minutes long. There is also a 10-minute break between the Math and Reading and Writing Sections.

{Subsection:} Math

The Math section is divided into two modules, each with 22 questions. Most of the questions are multiple choice, but some may require you to enter the answer rather than select it. *Calculators are allowed, and are built into the test-taking software*.

Topics covered: Algebra, Advanced Math, Problem-solving and Data Analysis, Geometry and Trigonometry.

{Subsection:} Reading and Writing

The Reading and Writing section is also divided into two modules, each with 27 questions. Each question is usually structured as follows: A short reading passage, followed by a multiple-choice question about it. It could be a “fill in the missing word” or something else.

This section tests your ability to:

- locate, understand and interpret information presented in a text or diagram.
- understand writers' uses of words and phrases in particular contexts and to evaluate how language is employed for particular effect.
- re-write part of a text to improve the effectiveness of its expression.
- edit a text so that it conforms to the conventions of standard language use, grammar and punctuation.

When and how can you take it?

Technically, you can take the SAT at any age, but most students take it when they are Juniors in high school (ages 16-17) or early in their senior year (ages 17-18). Tests run throughout the year, and all you have to do is book a test on the College Board website, which costs \$68 USD.

What's the point?

Many universities either require or recommend taking the SAT as part of their admissions process.

Scoring System

The maximum mark you can get on the SAT is 1600. Each section is scored from 200-800, but each correct answer is not necessarily the same mark. The College Board performs a process known as “scaling” which adjusts scores for difficulty levels across different test versions. The specifics of the process are unknown, so it is not possible to determine a mark for the SAT just based on how many answers you got right.

Average SAT scores of Ivy League Students

The majority of Ivy League Students scored at least a 1500 on the SAT, with the higher of the scores usually being in the Math section. While the SAT will not guarantee you admission into an Ivy League, it is part of the admissions process and may be that deciding factor that gets you into the university.

Some useful and free SAT resources

Khan Academy’s SAT Math and SAT Reading and Writing Courses

College Board Full Length SAT Practice Tests.

Bluebook SAT Practice Tests

Your SAT Coach YouTube Channel

References:

College Board. “*Structure of the SAT.*” SAT Suite, <https://satsuite.collegeboard.org/sat/whats-on-the-test/structure>. Accessed 27 June 2025.

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The Princeton Review. “*Ivy League SAT Score Comparison for Admission.*” <https://www.princetonreview.com/college-advice/ivy-league-sat-scores>. Accessed 27 June 2025.