

# Preparing for the SAT: Tips and Tricks

**The Basics.** The SAT is a college admissions test. The test lasts about four hours and tests three main areas of knowledge: math, critical reading, and writing. These three subjects are split into 10 sections of varying lengths. Most of the test is **multiple choice**, but the math section also contains a **student grid-in** section. At the beginning, you will have 25 minutes to write an essay, which will affect your writing score.

**Preparing for the SAT.** CONSISTENT, DAILY, TARGETED practice is key to doing well on the SAT! There are a multitude of **FREE** online and offline resources that you can access that will provide you with practice SAT questions and tests or explanations of difficult SAT concepts. **Make use of the what is available and FREE to you!** The SAT is a TRICKY test and it is something that students generally spend a lot of time preparing for. **START TODAY.** (My favorite tip: sign up for **The Official SAT Question of the Day** so that you're getting a little bit every day!)

**Mastering the Format.** The SAT is a **multiple choice test that penalizes for incorrect answers.** Learn how to work this system and use it to your advantage.

**PENALTIES.** For every question you answer **incorrectly**, you will **LOSE an ADDITIONAL 1/4 point** from your score. If you skip the question, you will neither gain nor lose points. The **EXCEPTION: student grid-in in the math section.** You will not lose points for incorrect answers in this section, so this is where you should have an answer for EVERY question.

**SHOULD I GUESS?** It is important to remember that on the SAT there is a **penalty for wrong answers!** The golden rule of guessing: **if you can eliminate at least one answer choice, then you should guess!** Use **process of elimination** to cut out ridiculous answers and TRAP answers (we will discuss this a little later on).

**TO OMIT OR NOT TO OMIT?** The golden rule of omitting: skip the question if you cannot eliminate any answer choices.

**ARE THE QUESTIONS HARDER AT THE END?** The answer: **mostly yes, EXCEPT for passage-based reading questions.**

Since **all the questions are worth the same amount**, it is advised that you spend more time on the questions you KNOW and less time struggling with the mindboggling questions you just can't figure out! This is a strategy to maximize your time and INCREASE YOUR SCORE!

**HOW MUCH TIME DO I HAVE LEFT?** It is absolutely essential to keep track of how much time you have left on each section. Remember **once the time for one section ends, you cannot return to the questions on that section.** If you spend 10 minutes answering one question that you will probably miss anyway and the section time ends before you get to look at the last five questions, you'll have lost points that could have boosted your score!

**SHOULD I SHOW MY WORK?** Answer: **YES. YES. A THOUSAND TIMES YES.** You can write anywhere and everywhere on your test booklet. You should be **underlining and annotating important info--not just in the critical reading sections of the test, but all in the MATH and WRITING sections.** However, you need to make sure to **bubble in all of your answers on the answer sheet!!** Or else all of your hard work will go to waste!

**THE SAT TRAP** This test is a tricky beast. It likes to make you think you're on the right track then it likes to **trick you into picking easy answers!** Don't fall for it! As you move further into each section, the easy answer will grow increasingly LESS LIKELY. This is especially true on the **math sections.** Make sure that you're **underlining important information you'll need to solve the problem and making note of multi-step problems.**

## TIPS, SECTION BY SECTION

### MATH

**Review the concepts that will appear on the SAT.** This information is WIDELY available. Use it to your advantage! (NOTE: topics like algebra II, trigonometry, or calculus will NOT be tested; knowing what topics WILL appear will guide your review)

**New batteries for your calculator!** Make sure to bring an acceptable calculator (per College Board regulations). Do NOT try to use your calculator for every question. You will waste more time this way.

**Avoid the SAT trap!** DOUBLE-CHECK your work, especially if the answer seems just a little too easy! Use **process of elimination** to weed out answers that do not make sense! (TIP: If you cannot solve the problem, try BACK-SOLVING or PLUGGING IN the answer choices) **Underline as you read** so you capture the important info from the questions!

**Visual Learners welcome!** When needed, **draw out a figure or sketch based on the information provided to help you**

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solve the problem.

**Enough, Let's Move On (ELMO!)** Spend the first few seconds of each question reading and annotating the important information that you need to solve the problem. **If, after reading the problem, you know it will take you longer than 1 minute to solve it, circle the number and skip the question!** Come back to it when you have answers all the questions that you can easily answer! For questions you cannot solve (you simply don't know how), leave them blank!

**CRITICAL READING:** The critical reading section is made up of **two types of questions: sentence completion questions and passage-based reading questions.**

**Sentence Completions first!!** All questions are worth the same amount! Sentence completion questions should be answered first because the reading comp passages will take more of your time. (TIP: **Look for the game changer word in double-blank sentences.** Words like *however, but, although, even though* will change the relationship between the two blanks and will signal that the two words will contrast rather than complement each other. **And, also, because** will often indicate a complementary relationship between the blanks)

**Passage-based reading is usually the most difficult section for students, so we'll discuss this section more thoroughly.**

**Strategic Reading!** PLAN AHEAD. Passage based reading is tough--even for experienced readers. Use your pencil (preferred) or finger to **track as you read** for fast and thorough comprehension. This helps to focus your attention! **Marking up your passage** will also aid comprehension and give you key points to reference when you're answering the questions. The answer to the reading comprehension questions are **always** in the passage. You should be able to find proof in the passage for the answer you choose. (GUIDE: underline important details and phrases; circle important nouns like dates, people, or places; for advanced readers: use **\*\*asterisks\*\*** to mark up words that alter the mood, theme, or tone of the passage)

**Know your three main question types!** Vocabulary in context, literal comprehension (recalling details), and extending reasoning (critical thinking)

**MORE ON "EXTENDED REASONING."** These questions measure your ability to **synthesize and analyze information** as well as to **evaluate the assumptions made and the techniques used by the author.** You'll be asked to **identify cause and effect, make inferences, recognize a main idea or an author's tone, or follow the logic of an analogy or an argument.**

**WRITING (MULTIPLE CHOICE):** You will tackle three question types: **improving sentences, identifying sentence errors, and improving paragraphs.** For this section, you'll need to **recognize and identify common sentence errors.**

**Improving Sentences** will ask you to consider one version of a sentence and decide whether it is **correct as is (answer choice A)** or if any of the four other choices are clearer in meaning. **Read carefully but quickly!** No golden rules, but generally shorter equals clearer ("I was handed the ball by the teacher" versus "The teacher handed me the ball"). **Look for the choice that is clear and easy to understand!** Look for common problem areas in sentences: **subject-verb agreement, parallelism, placement of modifiers and the use of relative clauses.** Remember that the right answer will be the one correct version among the five choices.

**Identifying sentence errors** require you to understand the conventions of the English language and recognize faults in grammar and usage. Like improving sentences, you want to watch out for the **common problem areas.** Ask yourself whether any of the underlined words or phrases in the sentence contains a grammar or usage error. Keep in mind that some sentences do not contain an error. Select the underlined word or phrase that must be changed to make the sentence correct. Choose **Choice E (no error)** if you believe that the sentence is correct as written. **THIS SOUNDS FUNNY.** Oftentimes, you'll be able to pick out the error without being able to explain why. Let your gut guide you if you're not a grammar nerd that likes to fix subject-verb disagreements.

**Improving Paragraphs** questions are few in number, so don't focus on prep for this section. **Quickly read the entire passage before answering questions.** The errors are in there **intentionally** so you will spot them as you read. Make notes as you read of the corrections that need to be made! Make sure your choices about individual sentences makes sense with the passage as a whole! Choose the **best** answer choice given.