

# Writing the SAT

The SAT is an exam used by many colleges in the US to measure a student's critical thinking skills. The Admissions departments in these colleges feel that the test will assess how well students can analyze and solve problems, which are skills they will need to succeed in college.

There are three major sections in the SAT, and each section receives a score between 200 - 800:

## **CRITICAL READING**

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There are two areas tested in this section:

1. *Sentence completion (19 questions)*  
Fill in the blank with correct vocabulary words with 1 or two words (multiple choice) in order to measure your knowledge of the meanings of words, and ability to understand how the different parts of a sentence fit together.
2. *Passage-based reading (48 questions)*  
with 100 – 850 words of text and multiple choice questions asking you to draw conclusions, to make comparisons, to give literal comprehension or about vocabulary.

## **MATHEMATICS**

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There are three timed sections:

1. Twenty questions with multiple choice answers
2. Eight multiple choice question and ten grid-in questions
3. Sixteen multiple choice questions

and they test you in these areas:

1. number and operations
2. algebra and functions
3. geometry and measurement
4. data analysis, statistics and probability:

## **WRITING**

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There are two parts to this section, multiple choice questions used to test a student's knowledge of grammar (30% of the writing section score) and a brief student-produced essay (70% of the writing score)

1. *Multiple Choice Questions*
  - error identification questions (18 questions)  
The question presents an awkward or grammatically incorrect sentence and the student must either locate the word producing the error and indicate that the sentence has no error
  - sentence improvement questions (25 questions)  
The question presents an awkward or grammatically incorrect sentence and the student must choose an acceptable choice that will fix the awkwardness
  - paragraph improvement questions (6 questions)  
You are presented with a poorly written student essay and are asked a series of questions on how you could improve it

## 2. Essay (25 minutes)

- You will be given an essay prompt (usually of a philosophical nature) and you must respond to it in a 250 – 300 word essay, using examples and references from your experience, studies or observations

### Tips and Tricks

Here are some things to consider that may help you do better on the SAT. The best tip of all, however, is PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE! Visit The Learning Centre to take a practice exam, or to learn even more tricks!

### **CRITICAL READING**

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- Do the sentence completion questions first, as they usually take less time to answer than the passage-based reading questions.
- As you go through the sentence completion questions, they become more difficult. However, the reading passage-based questions do not increase in difficulty, but follow the logic of the passage.
- Do not jump from passage to passage – answer as many questions as you can for a single passage, and then move on to the next.
- Make notes on the passages as you read them, if you think something may be important.
- Some people like to read the questions before they read the passage, so that they know what they're looking for when reading the passage.
- The answers come from the passage – they can be directly inferred or found in the passage you read.
- For the sentence completion questions that are missing two words, consider just one blank first; if one of the words in the answer choice is obviously incorrect, then you can eliminate that option from consideration.
- Look for key words and phrases such as "although," "however," "if," "but" and "since."
- Negative words (like not) and prefixes (like -un) reverse the meaning of phrases, so read questions carefully.
- They signal how the different parts of a sentence are logically connected to one another.
- Pay attention to words like "not" and "never" – they indicate a negation.

## **MATHEMATICS**

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- You can answer every question without a calculator, but bring one anyway, as you'll probably get through some questions faster. However, don't use a calculator on every questions; it will just waste time.
- If you find you're relying on the calculator to answer a question, you've probably misread or misunderstood the question.
- Bring a calculator you are used to and have used often. Bring an extra one as well!.
- You will be provided with the formulas you need at the beginning of each mathematics section; don't waste time memorizing them all.
- For the student-produced response questions, you know your answer is incorrect if it doesn't fit in the grid or if it has a negative value.
- If you don't know the answer to a student-produced response question, make an educated guess. In this section, you don't lose points for wrong answers.
- Read word problems very carefully.

## **WRITING (Essay Section)**

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- Follow the 5-paragraph structure: introduction, three body paragraphs and conclusion
- Think about the essay question and what you will write for 5 minutes at most. Spend 15 minutes writing your response, and the last 5 minutes proofreading it.
- Respond to the topic given to you; if you do not write on the topic, you will receive a 0 on this section.
- Acknowledge the other point of view to your thesis – you don't have to agree, but do show the graders you are aware that it exists and your point of view is better. You can do this in the conclusion of your essay.
- Use clear examples to support any of your arguments.
- Try to use varied and appropriate vocabulary. To do overuse action verbs, especially the verb "to be."
- In the "improving paragraphs" section, read through the whole essay first, to get a clear understanding of it.

## **GENERAL TIPS AND TRICKS**

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- Learn all the directions and instructions for each section ahead of time. That way, you won't have to waste time during the test reading them.
- Keep checking that you are filling in the circles on the right line, and in the right section sheet.
- Don't spend too much time on any one question: spend just a few seconds on the easy ones, and only one to two minutes on the hardest ones.
- Mark sure to mark any questions you skip so that you can find them easily afterwards.
- The hardest questions usually appear at the end of the section. These questions are designed to be answered right about 10% of the time, so don't stress out if you don't know them – answer the easiest ones first!
- This is a timed test, so keep your eye on the clock, and know how much time you have for each section and how much time remains. Remember to wear a watch – there's no guarantee there will be a working clock in the exam room!