

Common Sense Testing Tips for the ACT/PSAT/SAT/SAT II's

All tests

- ◆ Take both the ACT and the SAT. Many students do better on one than the other. Only submit your best set of scores to the college (if possible).
- ◆ Some colleges superscore; if they do, submit your best sets of scores.
- ◆ Get a baseline for each test early in your high school career. Your relative strengths and weaknesses probably will not change much, but you can gradually work on addressing your weaker areas rather than trying to cram. Take your baseline test on a date when you can obtain a copy of your answers and the test questions.
- ◆ Both CollegeBoard and ACT offer a free test question of the day. Incorporate these questions into your daily routine.
- ◆ Both CollegeBoard and ACT offer detailed information on their sites about what is covered on the tests. Click every link to see the details of the test sections so that you can understand what skills are being assessed.
- ◆ Sign up for Test Information Release (SAT) and the Question and Answer service (ACT) so you can review your actual tests. It costs more, but it is worth it.
- ◆ In terms of test prep, you can pay a lot of money or nothing. If you want an individual tutor, that option is out there. If you want to go to your local library and check out a test prep book from Princeton Review, Kaplan or Peterson's, etc., that free option is also there. What is important is making a choice that is right for you and your parents.
- ◆ Always check out what your [local library](#) offers for free test prep materials.
- ◆ Some test prep companies, such as Princeton Review, offer free practice tests. Go to the [Princeton Review site](#) to see what sites are near your zip code:
- ◆ There are many free test prep sites out there . . . use them. Try to duplicate real testing conditions when you practice. Some sites:
 - [ACT – SAT Prep Site](#)
 - [Princeton Review Free ACT Practice Test](#)
 - [Practice Test Site](#)

ACT

- ◆ Always answer every question since there is no penalty for guessing.
- ◆ Always take the writing section because more colleges are requiring it.
- ◆ December, April and June are dates when you can pay an additional fee for *Test Information Release*. You can obtain a copy of your answers, test questions, scoring instructions. Save these for future practice as well as analyze what questions you missed. Target your study time on the types of questions you missed.
- ◆ Do not send scores to colleges unless you feel confident that you will apply. It is better to send scores to schools after you know your scores. This costs more money, but you control what is sent to whom and when.
- ◆ ACT offers many test prep options on-line. If possible, only use the real ACT test prep questions. These are old ACT tests that have been released.
- ◆ *ACT Online Prep* is probably worth the money. For around \$20 you can take a diagnostic exam to determine your strengths and weaknesses as well as practice on old ACT test questions.

PSAT

- ◆ Colleges know that this is one test, one day. However, if you are able to take the PSAT in middle school or 9th grade, do so. Since the PSAT is a miniature version of the SAT, practicing on the PSAT is a great for getting ready for the longer SAT.
- ◆ CollegeBoard has access to free SAT prep via *My CollegeQuickstart*. When you take the PSAT, there is an access code on your results to allow you access to free SAT prep, college planning, a personality test to help you match yourself to majors and careers, projected SAT results, as well as look at specifics about your PSAT results.
- ◆ CollegeBoard has a link for free preparation for the PSAT. There are practice questions for each test section.
- ◆ Save your old PSAT tests and answer sheets. These are great practice for September and October in your junior year when the PSAT results count.
- ◆ Do not stress out about the PSAT. Some of the best students in the nation do not do well on this test during their junior year. It isn't unusual for a sharp sophomore to do better on the test in 10th grade as opposed to his junior year. Colleges look at your testing results as a whole when considering you for admission, along with many other factors such as academic achievement, community service, and honors.

SAT

- ◆ Pay particular attention to the PSAT information since this is directly related to the SAT.
- ◆ CollegeBoard has a number of resources for SAT prep. The Official SAT Online Course is one of their options at close to \$70. One great feature of this option is the on-line scoring of essays.
- ◆ Check out CollegeBoard's *SkillsInsight* for specifics on the skills needed for SAT score ranges.
- ◆ If essays are your weakness, you may wish to invest in *CollegeBoard's ScoreWrite: A Guide to Preparing for the SAT Essay* for around \$15.00.
- ◆ Many students get caught up in cramming on vocabulary for the SAT. Some students prepare by learning word roots of prefix/suffix meanings rather than studying long lists of words when only a small percentage of those words may actually be on the test. Overall, the best strategy is to build a solid vocabulary throughout your educational career by doing well in your classes and by reading a lot. Students who do best on the verbal sections of the SAT are often *voracious* readers, in that they are reading several books outside of the required books from school.
- ◆ For those wanting top scores on the SAT, check out CollegeBoard's *Answers Imagined*. This site offers advice on how to handle the toughest questions.
- ◆ When your parents took the SAT, there was a section on analogies. The analogies are gone, but the critical thinking is still required in the critical reading section.
- ◆ There is a myth about not guessing on the SAT. Statistically speaking, if you can not eliminate even one answer choice, then do not guess. However, if you can eliminate one or more choices, then guessing tends to work in your favor.
- ◆ Longer essays tend to snag better scores (MIT study). However, it is still all about the content.
- ◆ Consider doing research about individuals whose careers might apply to different types of writing questions (e.g., Steve Jobs).

SAT II's

- ◆ Many students do not realize that most highly selective colleges require SAT II's in addition to SAT or ACT requirements. Most colleges want a math subject test as well as a humanities option.
- ◆ Most people would say to take the SAT II subject exam right after you have taken the course in that subject. However, be careful about taking the SAT II test too early. For example, if you did well in freshman Honors Biology, it does not mean that you are ready for the SAT II test in that subject. If you took AP Biology during your junior year, you should definitely take the Biology subject test after finishing that course. The best advice is to look at the practice questions and what the test covers to determine readiness for a SAT II test.
- ◆ The SAT II subject tests are not offered all the time. Look at the test schedule well in advance of registering for the exams. Math tests are always offered, but finding an Italian test can be tough.
- ◆ CollegeBoard offers SAT II Subject test study guides for some subjects. It would be worth your time to see if the library has one of the books to help you decide which tests you should take. Always try to find the guides that have real SAT II released questions.
- ◆ Some study guides are better than others in particular subjects. You should not just assume one company has the best guides for all subjects. The smart approach is to find study guides from different companies and look at the same subject in all of them.
- ◆ Always check with your math teacher whether you should take Math L1 or L2.