

C H A P T E R

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Taking the SAT

► What Is the SAT?

The SAT Reasoning Test is a standardized test developed by the Educational Testing Service for The College Board, an association of colleges and schools. It contains questions that test skills in math, reading, and writing.

► Why Take the SAT?

Most colleges require prospective students to submit SAT Reasoning Test scores as part of their applications. Colleges use SAT exam scores to help them evaluate the reading, writing, and math skills of prospective students. Therefore, it is important to do your best on the SAT so you can show colleges what you are capable of accomplishing.

► Who Takes the SAT?

The SAT Reasoning Test is the most common standardized test that high school students take when applying to college. In fact, approximately two million students take the SAT each year.

► Will My SAT Scores Determine Whether I Get into College?

No. Your SAT scores are only one small part of any college application. In other words, your SAT scores alone will not determine whether or not a college accepts you as part of its student body. Let's say that again, a little louder: **YOUR SAT SCORES ALONE WILL NOT DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT A COLLEGE ACCEPTS YOU AS PART OF ITS STUDENT BODY.** Colleges look at individuals, not just test scores and grades. They want fascinating, curious, motivated people on their campuses, not a bunch of numbers.

When evaluating candidates, admissions officers look at your academic performance, but they also look at the rest of your life. What are your interests? How do you spend your time outside of school? What are your goals?

When you submit an application to college, you should make sure it shows what makes you a unique person. Colleges typically aim to fill their campuses with a diverse group of individuals. Think about what you can best offer to a college community. What are your strong points? Do you excel in music, theater, art, sports, academics, student government, community service, business, or other areas? It doesn't matter what your interests are. It only matters that you have them. Let your best qualities shine through in your application and you can be confident that you are presenting yourself as a strong possible candidate for admission.

So, don't sweat the SAT. Getting nervous about it won't help you anyway. As long as you follow through with your plan to prepare for it, your score can help you become an attractive candidate.

► When Do I Take the SAT?

The SAT is offered on Saturday mornings several times a year. Your high school guidance office can give you a schedule. You can also find a schedule online at www.collegeboard.com. Please note that Sunday administrations will occur the day after each Saturday test date for students who cannot test on Saturday for religious reasons.

► How Many Times Should I Take the SAT?

The number of times you take the SAT is up to you. You may register and take the exam as often as you wish. Most colleges will not hold an initial lower score against you, and some will be impressed by a substantially improved score, so taking the SAT twice or three times with the goal of raising your score is recommended if you think you can do better. However, some students prepare hard for their first SAT and feel satisfied with their initial score.

Regardless, you shouldn't take the SAT more than three times. Chances are your score will not change significantly on your fourth test. If you are still disappointed after your third score, your time, money, and energy will be better spent on other parts of your college application.

But no matter how many times you have taken the SAT, you're smart to be using this book. The only way to raise your SAT score is through preparation and practice.

► Where Is the SAT Given?

Many high school and college campuses host the SATs. When you register, you will be given a list of sites in your local area, and you can pick one that is comfortable and convenient for you.

► Where Do I Sign Up for the SAT?

To sign up for the SAT, you can:

1. Register online at The College Board's website: www.collegeboard.com.
2. Get the SAT Registration Bulletin from your high school guidance office. The Bulletin contains a registration form and other important information about the exam. If you are retaking the exam, you can also register by phone at 800-SAT-SCORE.

► How Long Is the SAT?

The SAT takes three hours and 45 minutes. In addition to the testing time, you will get two or three five- to ten-minute breaks between sections of the exam. You will also spend up to an additional hour filling out forms. Overall, you can expect to be at the testing location for about four and a half hours.

► What Is Tested on the SAT?

The SAT has approximately 160 questions divided into eight test sections:

- three critical reading sections
 - two 25-minute sections
 - one 20-minute section
- three math sections
 - two 25-minute sections
 - one 20-minute section

- two writing sections
 - one 35-minute multiple-choice section
 - one 25-minute essay

Your scores on these eight sections make up your SAT scores.

In addition to the core eight sections, there is one unscored “variable,” or “equating,” section that the test writers use to evaluate new questions before including them on future SATs. Thus, you will actually complete a total of nine sections on test day. But it will be impossible for you to tell which section is the variable section: It can be critical reading, multiple-choice writing, or math, and it can appear in any place on the exam. So although the variable section does not affect your SAT score, you must treat each section as if it counts.

► In What Order Are the Sections Tested?

The writing essay is always the first section of the SAT. The multiple-choice writing section is always the last section. The remaining sections can appear in any order.

► How Is the SAT Scored?

SAT scores range from 600–2400. You can score a minimum of 200 and a maximum of 800 on each subject: math, critical reading, and writing.

A computer scores the math questions. For the multiple-choice math questions, the computer counts the number of correct answers and gives one point for each. Then it counts your incorrect answers and deducts one-quarter point from the total of your correct answers. For the grid-in math questions, the computer counts the number of correct answers and gives one point for each. No points are subtracted for incorrect answers to the grid-in questions. If the score that results from the subtraction is a fraction of a point,

Four Steps to Scoring Math Questions on the SAT

For multiple-choice questions:

1. Correct answers are added: 1 point for each correct answer.
2. Incorrect answers are subtracted: $\frac{1}{4}$ point for each wrong answer.
3. Your raw score is the result of adding correct answers, subtracting incorrect answers, and then rounding the result to the nearest whole number.

For grid-in questions:

1. Right answers are added: 1 point for each correct answer.
2. Wrong answers receive zero points: No points are subtracted.
3. Your raw score is the total number of correct answers.

Once questions are scored, raw scores are converted to scaled scores, using an equating process.

your score is rounded to the nearest whole number. Your raw score for the math sections is then converted to a scaled score (between 200 and 800), using the statistical process of equating.

► Math Score Reporting

The College Board will send you a report on your scores. They will also send your scores to any schools (up to four) you requested on your application. Colleges, naturally, are used to seeing these reports, but they can be confusing to everybody else. Here's how you look at them:

You will see your scaled math score in a column headed *Score*. There are also columns titled *Score Range* and *Percentiles College-bound Seniors*. The information in these columns can be useful in your preparations for college.

Score Range

Immediately following your total scaled math score, there is a score range, which is a 60-point spread. Your actual scaled score falls right in the middle of this range.

Based on experience, The College Board believes that if you retake the SAT without further preparation, you are unlikely to move up or down more than thirty points within each subject tested. In other words, if you scored a 550 in math on your first SAT, chances are you won't score less than 520 or more than 580 in math if you take the exam again without any extra preparation. For this reason, it presents your score within a 60-point range to suggest that those are the range of scores that you could expect to get on the SAT.

Keep in mind that The College Board believes your score won't change if you retake the SAT without further preparation. *With further preparation*, such as using this book, your score can improve by much more than 30 points.

Percentile

Your score report will also include two percentile rankings. The first measures your SAT scores against those of all students nationwide who took the test. The second measures your scores against only the students in your state who took the test.

The higher your percentile ranking the better. For example, if you receive a 65 in the national category

and a 67 in the state category, your scores were better than 65% of students nationwide and better than 67% in your state. In other words, of every 100 students who took the test in your state, you scored higher than 67 of them.

Additional Score Information

Along with information about your scaled score, The College Board also includes information about your raw score. The raw score tells you how well you did on each type of critical reading, math, and writing question—how many questions you answered correctly, how many you answered incorrectly, and how many you left blank. You can use this information to determine whether you can improve on a particular type of question. If you have already taken the SAT, use this information to see where you need to focus your preparation.

You will also receive information about the colleges or universities to which you have asked The College Board to report your scores. This information will include typical SAT scores of students at these schools as well as other admission policies and financial information.

When you look at SAT scores for a particular school, keep in mind that those scores are not the only criterion for admission to or success at any school. They are only part of any application package. Also, your SAT report includes only the score range for the middle 50% of first-year students at each school. It tells you that 25% of the first-year students scored higher than that range and the 25% scored below that range. So if your score falls below that range for a particular school, don't think admissions officers automatically won't be interested in you. In fact, one-fourth of their first-year students scored below that range.

