

CHAPTER 1

Introducing the SAT

Welcome to the *Official SAT Study Guide!* This guide is designed for you. Return to it again and again in the coming weeks and months. Reading it is an excellent way to become familiar with the SAT — its content, structure, timing, question types, and more. The information, advice, and sample questions will help you prepare to take the test with confidence.

Tackling new things makes most of us nervous, but when we can learn a great deal about a new situation in advance, we feel much more able to take a deep breath and meet the challenge. Learning about the SAT through this guide and taking practice tests will help you be well prepared when your test date arrives.

How Does the SAT® Measure Academic Achievement?

Questions on the SAT will not ask you to recall details of *Hamlet* or to name the capital of Nevada or the location of the Rappahannock River. If you recall those facts, good for you, but the SAT will ask for something different. Instead of asking you to show what you've memorized, the questions invite you to exercise your thinking skills.

All of the learning you've done — from childhood to now — contributes to how you think, how your mind manages information. Even if you don't recall the details of a history or science lesson, the process of learning information and blending it with previously learned information is key to becoming a skilled thinker.

The world needs more people who can use their thinking skills to solve problems, communicate clearly, and understand complex relationships. The best high school courses promote thinking skills, and colleges are looking for students who are skilled thinkers. The SAT is designed to measure the thinking skills you'll need to succeed in college and career.



REMEMBER

The SAT isn't designed to assess how well you've memorized a large set of facts; rather, the SAT assesses your ability to apply the knowledge and skills you'll need in college and career.

**REMEMBER**

The SAT has been carefully crafted by many people, experts in their fields, to ensure that it's a fair test that assesses the knowledge and skills you'll need to succeed in college and career.

**REMEMBER**

Colleges care about your SAT score because it's a strong predictor of how you'll perform in college. By doing well on the SAT, you can show colleges that you're ready to succeed.

How Is the SAT Developed?

The process of developing a test given to millions of students around the world is complex and involves many people. The SAT is developed by the College Board, a not-for-profit organization that was founded more than a century ago to expand access to higher education. The College Board is a large organization, with more than 6,000 schools, colleges, and universities as members.

College Board test developers are content experts in physics, biology, statistics, math, English, history, computer science, sociology, education, psychology, and other disciplines. They use their expertise to create questions for the SAT that will allow students to demonstrate their best thinking.

Committees of high school and college instructors review every potential SAT question to make sure that each one measures important knowledge and skills, that the questions are fair to all students, and that they're written in a way that models what students are learning in the best high school classrooms.

Colleges want to admit students who will have successful college experiences and go on to have successful careers. Colleges use the SAT in admissions because it's developed according to rigorous specifications, with input from numerous experts, to assess what matters most for college and career readiness and success. Independent research demonstrates that the single most important factor for demonstrating college readiness is high school GPA. Even more predictive than GPA, though, is GPA combined with an SAT score.

How Is the SAT Organized?

The SAT has four tests, with the Essay being optional. The three tests that everyone will take are (1) the Reading Test, (2) the Writing and Language Test, and (3) the Math Test. The timing and number of questions are as follows:

Component	Time Allotted (minutes)	Number of Questions/Tasks
Reading	65	52
Writing and Language	35	44
Math	80	58
Essay (optional)	50	1
Total	180 (230 with Essay)	154 (155 with Essay)

**REMEMBER**

More scores = more information. The scores reported on the SAT provide detailed information about your achievement and readiness for college and career.

The Essay is optional, but some high schools and colleges require it. Depending on your high school and your college choices, you may already know whether or not you'll take the Essay. If you have any uncertainty — for instance, if you can imagine that you might transfer from a school that doesn't require it to one that does — consider taking the SAT with Essay.

How Is the SAT Scored?

When you take the SAT, you don't get just one score. The SAT reports a total score, but there are also section scores, test scores, cross-test scores, and subscores. This wide array of scores provides insight into your achievement and your readiness for college and career.

You earn points on the SAT by answering questions correctly. No points are deducted for wrong answers, so go ahead and give your best answer to every question — there's no advantage to leaving any blank.

Total Score and Section Scores

The total score is the number most commonly associated with the SAT. The total score ranges from 400 to 1600. This score is the sum of the scores on the Evidence-Based Reading and Writing section (which includes the Reading and Writing and Language Tests) and the Math section. Of the 154 questions in the entire SAT (not counting the Essay), 96 questions are on the Reading and the Writing and Language Tests and 58 questions are on the Math Test.

Section scores for Evidence-Based Reading and Writing and for Math are reported on a scale from 200 to 800. The Evidence-Based Reading and Writing section score is derived in equal measure from the scores on the Reading and the Writing and Language Tests. The Math section score is derived from the score on the Math Test.

Test Scores

Test scores are reported on a scale of 10 to 40 for each of the three required tests: Reading, Writing and Language, and Math.

Cross-Test Scores

Cross-test scores — one for **Analysis in History/Social Studies** and one for **Analysis in Science** — are reported on a scale of 10 to 40 and are based on selected questions in the Reading, Writing and Language, and Math Tests that reflect the application of reading, writing, language, and math skills in history/social studies and science contexts.

Subscores

Subscores are reported on a scale of 1 to 15. They provide more detailed information about how you're doing in specific areas of literacy and math.

Two subscores are reported for Writing and Language: Expression of Ideas and Standard English Conventions.

The **Expression of Ideas** subscore is based on questions focusing on topic development, organization, and rhetorically effective use of language.

The **Standard English Conventions** subscore is based on questions focusing on sentence structure, usage, and punctuation.



REMEMBER

Subscores provide additional insight into your performance on specific topics and skills.

The Math Test reports three subscores: Heart of Algebra, Problem Solving and Data Analysis, and Passport to Advanced Math.

Heart of Algebra focuses on linear equations, systems of linear equations, and functions.

Problem Solving and Data Analysis focuses on quantitative reasoning, the interpretation and synthesis of data, and problem solving in rich and varied contexts.

Passport to Advanced Math focuses on topics important for progressing to more advanced mathematics, such as understanding the structure of expressions, reasoning with more complex equations, and interpreting and building functions.

The final two subscores — Words in Context and Command of Evidence — are based on questions in both the Reading and the Writing and Language Tests.

Words in Context questions address word and phrase meanings in context as well as rhetorical word choice.

Command of Evidence questions ask you to interpret and use evidence found in a wide range of passages and informational graphics, such as graphs, tables, and charts.



REMEMBER

Test scores will reflect your performance on each of the three required tests on the SAT. The three different Essay scores serve a similar role.

Essay Scores

The scores for the optional SAT Essay are reported separately and aren't factored into any other scores. The Essay yields three scores, one each on three dimensions:

Reading: How well you demonstrate your understanding of the included passage

Analysis: How well you analyze the passage and carry out the task of explaining how the author of the passage builds an argument to persuade an audience

Writing: How skillfully you craft your response

Two raters read each response and assign a score of 1 to 4 to each of the three dimensions. The two raters' scores are combined to yield Reading, Analysis, and Writing scores, each on a scale of 2 to 8.

The SAT Score Report

You'll be able to access all of your scores online through your free College Board account. This account will be the same one you use to register for the SAT. Learn more at sat.org.

Score Range

The SAT Score Report includes a score range for each of the scores described above. This range indicates where your scores would likely fall if you took the test several times within a short period of time (for instance, on three consecutive days). If you were to do that, you would see numbers that differ, but not by much.

Percentiles

Your SAT Score Report includes the percentile rank for each score and subscore. Percentile ranks are a way of comparing scores in a particular group. For the SAT, separate percentile ranks are reported based on your state and on the total group of test takers. Each percentile rank can range from 1 to 99 and indicates the percentage of test takers who attained a score equal to or lower than yours. For instance, a perfect total score of 1600 would have a percentile rank of 99, meaning that 99% of people taking the test achieved a 1600 or lower score. A percentile rank of 50 means that half of students taking the test scored at or below your score.

Online Score Report

The SAT Online Score Report gives you the meaning behind your numbers by providing a summary of how you did on each section, including how many questions you got right, got wrong, or didn't answer. The tool offers insight into your strengths and weaknesses by showing your results grouped by subject and question difficulty. The online report provides other information as well:

- Percentiles to help you see how your results compare with those of other students
- A search tool for career and college majors, with suggestions based on information you provide in your profile
- If you took the Essay, a scanned copy of your response and the prompt

Being able to review your response to the Essay gives you an opportunity to reconsider how well you understood the passage, the effectiveness of your analysis, and the quality of your writing. You can reflect on whether your points were clear, how well you provided support for your points, and how effectively you structured your response.

Additional SAT Services

When you register for the SAT, you'll be able to choose reports and services that can be helpful in a number of ways. Depending on which date you test on, there are different options for receiving detailed feedback. Browse through the types of information that each of the following reports and services offers you.

Additional Score Reports

Registering for the SAT allows you to send your results to up to four institutions; you can identify these institutions within nine days of taking the test. Take advantage of all four score reports, whether you send them to colleges or to scholarship sites. Sending your scores to colleges early in the college application process is a great way to show your interest. Use your online account to order additional score reports.



REMEMBER

Your percentile rank indicates the percentage of test takers who scored at or below your score.



REMEMBER

You'll be able to access your online score report through your free College Board account. This report will give you a detailed breakdown of your performance.



REMEMBER

Within nine days of taking the test, you can decide to have your SAT results sent, free of charge, to four institutions.

**REMEMBER**

The Score Choice service allows you to select which scores (by test date) to send to your chosen colleges. Keep in mind, however, that you can't choose to submit specific section scores from different test dates.

Score Choice™

If you take the SAT more than once, you can use the Score Choice service. Score Choice allows you to select which scores, by test date, to send to your chosen colleges or scholarship programs, in accordance with each institution's individual score use practices. Note that this service is optional. If you don't select Score Choice when registering, all of your scores will be sent to institutions receiving your results. Most colleges consider only your best scores when they review your application, though this varies by institution. If you want only your best scores to be seen, you should use Score Choice.

Each school or program has its own deadlines and policies for how scores are used. Check with the individual school or scholarship program to make sure you're following its guidelines.

Note that you can't select one section score from one test date and another section score from another date. (For example, you won't be able to send your Evidence-Based Reading and Writing score from one date and your Math score from a different date.) Also, if you took the SAT with Essay, you won't be able to send scores without the Essay scores as well.

Student Answer Verification Services

The SAT Program offers two answer verification services for the SAT. These services are intended to help you feel confident that your test was scored accurately by providing information about the questions and how you answered them. Depending on when and where you take the SAT, you can order either the Student Answer Service (SAS) or the Question-and-Answer Service (QAS). You can order the services when you register for the SAT or up to five months after your test date.

Both SAS and QAS tell you which questions you answered correctly, which ones you didn't answer correctly, and which ones you didn't answer. You'll also see information about the type and difficulty of questions. QAS provides additional information, including the test questions themselves. The Essay prompt is only released as part of the Question-and-Answer Service.

**REMEMBER**

Enrolling in the optional Student Search Service allows colleges and scholarship programs to contact you to invite you to apply.

Student Search Service

All students who take the SAT are eligible to opt in to the Student Search Service, which helps colleges and scholarship recognition organizations find you. If you sign up during registration, your name and contact information, GPA, date of birth, grade level, high school, email address, extracurricular activities, and intended college major will be put into a database that colleges and scholarship programs use when they want to locate and recruit students with particular characteristics or interests.

Please note:

- Joining Student Search Service is voluntary.
- Colleges that participate in the program don't receive your scores as part of their membership. They may request information about students whose scores are in a particular range, but your scores will not be provided through this service.
- Any colleges that contact you are doing so to invite you to apply. Going through the application process is the only way to be admitted to a college. Colleges use the service to locate potential students who they think should apply.
- Student Search Service is restricted to colleges and scholarship programs. Your information will never be sold to a commercial marketing firm or retailer of merchandise or services (such as a test-preparation company).

SAT Fee Waivers

Students who face financial barriers to taking the SAT can receive SAT fee waivers to cover the cost of testing. Seniors who use a fee waiver to take the SAT will also receive four college application fee waivers to use in applying to colleges that accept the waivers. You can learn about eligibility and the other benefits offered to help you in the college application process at sat.org/fee-waivers.

**REMEMBER**

Visit sat.org/fee-waivers to learn more about SAT fee waivers and college application fee waivers.