

The Essential Guide to the SAT

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(Answer sheets for taking the Practice Test can be found at the back of the *Guide*.)

Introduction to The Essential Guide

Welcome to the world of *SAT* test prep. Like thousands of other high school students, you are probably both excited and anxious about all of the steps that will lead you to a college that is right for you. Among those steps is taking college entrance exams, so, perhaps you are wondering what you can do to make sure that you achieve your very best on these tests. Well, not to worry. Help is on the way!

Overview and Goals of the *SAT* Prep Program

Our materials are designed for students who want to increase their scoring potential or improve on previous scores on the *SAT* and for those who are seeking a refresher course in particular verbal, writing, and/or math skills.

Our program is designed to boost your confidence in taking college entrance exams by providing:

- vital information about the nature and construction of the *SAT* and about test registration;
- tips for mastering the art of taking standardized tests in general and the *SAT Reasoning Test*, specifically;
- formal instruction and tips for tackling test prep and taking the exam;
- help for increasing your reading vocabulary;
- the student perspective on issues related to college entrance testing;
- a fun way—in video game format—for reviewing material and practicing test-taking skills;
- a brief bibliography of other resources to aid you in preparing for the *SAT Reasoning Test*.

In fact, we believe that we offer you a unique approach to mastering the *SAT*. Our approach is tailored to students who are self-motivated — those who can and will work on their own in preparing for the *SAT*, but who are not interested in using the typical “big, fat book” of 200+ pages to do so.

Included with this guide is a fun, easy-to-use practice test in the form of an *SAT* test prep game called *Zero Hour Threat*. Created by I.D.E.A.S. at the Disney-MGM Studios, it is an interactive action game designed to increase standardized test scores as well as enhance general mathematics and vocabulary skills. With each correct answer, students move one step closer to decoding a virus that international criminals have set in place to infect the United States, banking systems. You will be able to work on enhancing your *SAT Reasoning Test* scores while having fun by playing a state-of-the-art video game. The *Zero Hour Threat* CD is not a stand-alone study program. It is designed for use in conjunction with the review materials, questions, and other tools provided in *The Essential Guide to the SAT*.

In addition to the CD game, you will find skill-building exercises, along with practice questions in each category of the *SAT Reasoning Test* and one 3 hour 45 minute practice test to provide you with a simulated experience in taking the actual *SAT*. For each of these, we will provide the opportunity for you to score your test by providing the correct answers and the rationale behind each of those responses.

Frequently Asked Questions and Student Concerns

Below is a list of some frequently asked questions and concerns raised by students regarding the *SAT Reasoning Test*.

- Why should I take the *SAT Reasoning Test*?
- What is the difference between the *SAT Reasoning Test* and the *SAT Subject Tests*?
- How do I register for *SAT* exams?
- What subjects are covered on the *SAT Reasoning Test*?
- How is the *SAT* scored?
- What tools may I or should I bring to the *SAT* test site on the day of the exam?
- What is the format of the exam?
- How can I prepare for the exam?
- Which method of preparation for college entrance testing is best?
- How long should I spend on each question?
- If I don't know the answer to some questions, should I guess?

Each of these questions will be addressed in the appropriate chapters of the *Guide*. You should read each chapter carefully and thoroughly in order to make the most of the material provided. You should also jot down any other questions that come to mind as you read and engage in the activities found in each chapter. If you find that you have additional questions or concerns, you may consult the guidance or college counselor at your school or visit the *College Board* website at www.collegeboard.com for further information about *SAT* tests.

Optimizing Your Use of *The Essential Guide to the SAT*

To get the most out of the *Guide*, we suggest that you follow the directions to the letter. You should plan to work with the written material a chapter at a time, setting aside time each day for studying the content and completing the exercises. On a daily basis, review the *SAT* vocabulary building material (provided in the verbal review section of the *Guide*), using the suggested strategies for increasing your reading comprehension and writing an effective essay. And you can, of course, play *Zero Hour Threat* as frequently as time permits. (Remember that getting into college depends largely on your academic performance and that success at school is a result of hard work in the classroom and completion of your homework and other assignments.)

We hope that you will find our approach exciting and rewarding. After utilizing this unique test preparation method that combines work and play, you should be on your way to increasing your *SAT* scoring power.

Using *The Essential Guide to the SAT* will...

- 1) Boost your confidence
- 2) Increase your potential for high scores
- 3) Increase your vocabulary
- 4) Help you master the art of test-taking

Chapter One: Essential Facts

What is the SAT?

The *SAT* college entrance examinations, designed and developed by *The Educational Testing Service (ETS)* in Princeton, New Jersey and administered by *The College Board*, are taken by more than 2 million people annually. There are two categories of this examination program—the *SAT Reasoning Test* and the *SAT Subject Tests*.

SAT Reasoning Test

This exam assesses critical thinking abilities necessary for successful college level study. It is a 3 hour 45 minute test that utilizes verbal and mathematical questions to measure skill in essay writing, critical reading/sentence completion, and grammar/use of conventions, as well as mathematical reasoning.

The test begins with a writing section during which you are asked to demonstrate your ability to express yourself effectively by writing a brief, well-organized essay. This essay should reflect skill in stating and supporting a main idea and in utilizing proper sentence structure and diction. After completing your essay, you will be tested on the remaining skills—critical reading/comprehension/sentence completion; grammar/writing conventions; and mathematics — through 20- and 25-minute sections presented in random order.

Each section — writing, reading, and mathematics — can result in scores ranging from 200 to 800 for a total score ranging from 600 to 2400. (One of the 25-minute sections, called the “equating” or “variable,” will not be scored or reflected in your total score. The questions in this section are used to analyze questions for use on future exams and do not count in scoring the exam.) Below is a chart that summarizes the contents of the *SAT Reasoning Test*:

Critical Reading (200-800 points)

(Multiple-choice responses to passage reading; sentence completion)

Two 25-minute sections

One 20-minute section

Mathematics (200-800 points)

(Multiple-choice and student-generated responses to numbers and operations, algebraic functions, geometry, probability, statistics, and data analysis)

Two 25-minute sections

One 20-minute section

Writing (200-800 points)

(Short essay measuring organization, development of main idea, sentence structure, and diction; multiple choice)

One 25-minute section (essay)

One 35-minute section (identifying errors; improving sentences and paragraphs)

SAT Subject Tests

These tests are designed to allow students the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge in specific areas of study. Formerly called the *SAT II, Subject Tests* are offered in five categories—English, history/social studies, mathematics, science, and languages. Each *Subject Test* is a 1-hour multiple-choice examination, allowing students to take up to three tests on the same day. (For detailed information about the *SAT Subject Tests*, visit www.collegeboard.com.)

Who Should Take the *SAT Reasoning Test*?

As a college entrance examination, the *SAT Reasoning Test* is taken largely by high school juniors and seniors. Most American colleges and universities accept the *SAT*, along with a record of academic performance (the high school transcript), evidence of involvement in extra- and co-curricular activities, recommendations, essays, and other supportive documents, as a part of the application profile of potential students.

Since the *Reasoning Test* measures mathematics through the third year of college preparatory study, we recommend that students take their first *SAT Reasoning Test* no earlier than the spring of their junior year in high school, unless they are highly advanced in their academic work. The majority of colleges record their applicants' *SAT* scores using the highest score achieved in each area of the test. Therefore, students who achieve a high score in one or two areas but feel the need to improve on scores in other areas should feel free to take the exam again, prior to their college application deadlines.

How do I register for the *SAT* and what fees apply?

Test registration materials are available in your high school guidance or college counseling office. You will find test dates and registration deadlines posted in both of these locations as well.

You can also register online at www.collegeboard.com. There are many advantages to registering online, including the ability to confirm your registration, print your *SAT* test admission ticket, and receive or send your exam scores.

The fees for taking the *SAT Reasoning Test* and the *SAT Subject Tests* are outlined in the registration materials or may be found online at www.collegeboard.com. Since additional fees may apply under various circumstances, it is wise to read the registration material carefully.

You may be eligible for a fee waiver to offset the costs related to *SAT* tests. (This may also apply to college application fees at colleges that work in cooperation with the *SAT* Fee Waiver Service of *The College Board*.) Fee waiver information is available through your guidance or college counselor, and fee waiver cards can be procured only from the counselor, even for online registration. Home-schooled students must provide the local high school proof of eligibility for fee waivers. To use the card, you must register for the *SAT* exams according to regular posted deadlines.

Chapter Two: Test-Taking Tips

The next two chapters will focus on the review of skills related to the areas tested on the *SAT Reasoning Test*. Along with skill review, you will find tips and strategies for tackling specific types of questions. This chapter will center on general tips for taking standardized college entrance tests. While we cannot guarantee that these tips will work for every student, you should consider them as good advice for any test-taker.

Nora, a student who recently took the SAT, offers the following advice:

- **Dress in layers and bring a sweater or jacket.**
Test sites use the cafeteria, auditorium, or other spaces that are large enough to hold all of the test-takers, but schools often turn off the heat or air conditioning on the weekends. It is difficult to concentrate when you are too hot or too cold.
- **Bring a watch.**
Basic time management is up to you! The proctors tell you how much time you have for each section, when to start, when to stop, and when you have 5 minutes left. You should pay attention to how long you are taking on the questions and pace yourself during the test.
- **Skip hard questions or use your best guess.**
You can usually narrow your choices down to two possible correct answers. That will give you a 50% chance of answering the question correctly. (We will cover guessing in more detail below.) Approaches to this strategy differ when taking the *ACT*.
- **Replace, in your mind, long hard story character names, like Jedidiah, Beauregard, Shaneequa...with Bill or Jane.**
You can get lost in the names and it can draw your attention away from the question.
- **Read carefully!**
Make sure you understand the main idea of the story. Ask yourself these two questions:
 - 1) What is the story about -- the subject?
 - 2) How does the subject of the story relate to the questions?
- **Review the basic concepts** — arithmetic operations and their order in solving problems, algebraic formulas, etc.
- **Prepare yourself by studying a few days of basic math formulas** a week before the test. (Example: $A = bh_2$)
- **Know a bit about word problems** and how to apply basic formulas to them.