

Taking the SAT

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What is the SAT?

The SAT is a standardized test taken for college admissions. It consists of three sections: Critical Reading, Math, and Writing, which measure your skill level in those respective areas. The SAT is scored out of 2400 points, with each section worth 800 points. It is extremely important as many colleges and universities require the SAT (or ACT) as part of your application, and it can play an important role in the admissions process. Scoring well on the SAT can also make you eligible for certain scholarships and awards.

When is the SAT offered?

The SAT is offered seven times a year, around once a month from October to June. The remaining dates for the 2008-2009 school year are May 2, 2009 and June 6, 2009. The test is 3 hours and 45 minutes long, with time divided about equally between the three sections.

When should I take the SAT?

You should take the SAT your junior year after some preparation. This way, even if you do not score well, you can always retake the test later during junior year or during senior year. Taking the test too late during your senior year may prevent you from submitting your test scores on time to the colleges you are applying to. Get the SAT out of the way so you can focus on your applications.

THE THREE SECTIONS

Critical Reading

The Critical Reading section consists of sentence completion questions and questions regarding a reading passage. Common topics for the reading passage questions concern tone, the meaning of a word in context, the overall theme of the passage, etc.

Math

The Math section consists of mostly multiple choice and a few questions where you fill in your own answer. Topics tested include algebra, geometry, functions, probability, etc. There is no trigonometry or calculus.

Writing

The Writing section has questions on identifying sentence errors, improving sentences, and improving paragraphs. There is also a 25 minute essay on a given prompt, normally an argument of some sort.

How should I study for the SAT?

The best way to study is to do practice tests. Use the official book of SAT tests published by the College Board. You can choose to do the entire test in one sitting or go slowly section by section, but remember to review the questions you got wrong. If you have time, review the questions you got right too so you understand why that answer is correct.

My score wasn't too good. Should I retake it?

You don't have to retake it if you already scored in the upper range. Those extra 30 points or so won't make a difference in college decisions. If you do plan to retake the SAT, make sure you allow ample time to review and do some practice tests.

What about the ACT?

The ACT is primarily administered in the Midwest. It is out of 36 points, and has four sections: English, Math, Reading, and Science. There is also an optional Writing section with a 25 minute essay that you should take. Most schools (Stevenson) will require you to take the ACT, but you should take the SAT as well.