



Tuesday, March 24, 2009

6 Ways to Tackle the New SAT

With the College Board's new score-reporting policy, there are an increasing number of strategies

By Lucia Graves

Posted July 18, 2008

When it comes to college admissions, there are three pieces to the puzzle: your academic record, your personal record, and your standardized test scores. While the first two parts take years or even a lifetime to build, the third part represents just a few hours of a Saturday morning (plus however long you spent prepping for the test). Can you guess which part is the most prone to gaming? Beginning in March 2009, the College Board's new policy, which allows students to pick which scores a college sees, will give you even more control over how your scores are perceived.

***Updated on 7/18/08
at 5:30 p.m.***

People Who Read This Also Read

- [Stanford Rejects SAT Score Choice](#)
- [World's Best Colleges and Universities: Top 200](#)
- [Kids Can Pick Which SAT Scores a College Sees](#)
- [Girls as Good as Boys at Math](#)
- [Princeton's Admissions Policies Investigated](#)

Recommendations by [loomia](#)

The College Board, which owns the test, says that preparation doesn't really make a major difference and recommends students take the SAT only once or twice. "There is no trick to the test," says Laurence Bunin, senior vice president of the SAT. But many people still believe there are strategies you can use to outsmart the SAT, particularly with the new score reporting policy. Here are the six tips these people cite most often:

Make a calendar and start early

The PSAT can be taken as early as freshman year, and Rod Bugarin, director of marketing at IvyWise, a New York-based college consulting firm, recommends students start taking the SAT as early as sophomore year. Map out a plan by looking at the College Board's [test dates](#), and then check your academic calendar and extracurricular schedule. (You don't want to take the SAT the same week as your midterms or soccer

championship.) Next, plot out a week-by-week schedule where you review a lesson on a specific topic each week and do targeted practice in that skill area.

Practice, practice, practice

Many high schools provide SAT prep courses as part of their curricular offerings, a variety of community-based organizations have prep programs as well, and expensive prep programs can teach you strategies like when to guess (whenever you can eliminate one or more answers) and how to manage your time (questions go from easy to hard). You can also take advantage of free websites like [Number2.com](#) or even the College Board's own [SAT Preparation Center](#). But remember: You only get out what you put in. "If you want to play in the Friday night football game, your coach would insist that you attend all practices," says Mary Kelleher, an independent educational consultant in Andover, Mass. "The same applies to lengthy tests."

Stage a dress rehearsal

Karan Goel, CEO of [PrepMe](#), a Chicago-based test preparation company, suggests taking a monthly practice test in realistic, timed conditions on a Saturday morning. "Don't take the

practice test in a quiet room at home—go to somewhere where there is ambient noise like a local café so that you'll practice with distractions," he says. This way, when you go to the real test center, it will seem more familiar.

Just keep taking the SAT

Students raise their scores by an average of only 40 points on the second test. "But if you have a very large sample—say, eight or 10 tests—there is a good likelihood that one of those tests will be an outlier—that a particular test will fall on the high end of the test range," says Scott White, director of guidance at Montclair High School in Montclair, N.J. After all, he says, no one argues that an SAT test is an exact measure of ability. It's an approximation, affected by many factors: whether the students happen to get more questions on topics they handle better, whether they guess better, whether they are more seasoned test takers, whether they got enough sleep and food, and the general testing conditions.

Apply only to schools that let you select which SAT scores you report

Under the new policy, some colleges may still require applicants to submit all test-taking attempts. Ned Johnson of PrepMatters Inc., a test preparatory and educational counseling firm in Bethesda, Md., points out that if you take the SAT 15 times and are then forced to submit that to colleges, it won't look good. So apply just to schools that let you hide your scores. If students band together in applying only to schools that let them hide their scores, that will put pressure on schools to give in to the score-choice policy.

Use the SAT Subject Tests strategically

If you're taking an AP test in May, try to sign up for a comparable SAT Subject Test in May and June (recall these tests cover specific subject areas and can sometimes be used for course placement). If you do poorly on an AP Spanish test, for example, you may be able to submit your SAT Subject Test score to a college instead. If the SAT Subject Test goes poorly too, you can study and retake it in June and beyond. Though not all schools look at SAT Subject Tests, some do (particularly highly competitive schools). Don't you want to have choices?

Tags: [college admissions](#) | [SAT](#) | [College Board](#)

Copyright © 2009 U.S. News & World Report LP All rights reserved.