

9 Tips Parents Can Give High School Students To Help Them Master the SATs

BY DAN MOLLOY

Dispel the myths

Approach the SATs as a fun challenge for showcasing your skills; the SAT is not an evil plot to spoil college dreams. Though the testing process can seem intimidating, remember that college applicants are evaluated based on their overall application including essays, academic record, extracurricular participation, and other factors.

Buy the Blue Book

The blue book is the single best resource for SAT preparation. Created by the College Board – the same people that administer the actual test – the book contains a thorough concept review, 10 full practice tests and costs only \$20.00

Use Khan Academy

The only drawback to the blue book is that the answers are not explained. Without worked solutions, it can be difficult to fill in a student's knowledge gaps. Thankfully, the generous founder of Khan Academy has created free videos solving and explaining in detail every math problem in the blue book.

Practice the 80/20 way

While repetition is excellent for reinforcing skills, it is better to spend 80% of your study time learning the 20% of concepts that are foreign or challenging. Use the practice test as a measuring stick to identify gaps, and review time as an opportunity to fill them.

Tips and tricks

There is no shortcut for a solid mathematical foundation. Competency is developed over years of study. However, there are a few quick wins that students of any ability level can take advantage of.

- **Do the easy problems first.** Since all problems are worth the same amount, and they get incrementally harder, don't waste time on the most challenging questions unless you are fairly confident you have already correctly answered most of the easy and intermediate questions.
- **Try answer choices, starting with C.** As with all multiple choice tests, the answer is staring you in the face! Sometimes you can plug in the answer choices and just see what works. To save time, plug in the middle value, usually answer choice C, if answer values are in order. Using this technique you will be able to eliminate three answer choices at one time.
- **Skip around.** There are no rules saying you must attempt the questions in order. If a problem looks tricky, skip past it and revisit later, time permitting.
- **Take a guess.** If you can eliminate any of the answer choices, it is to your mathematical advantage to guess. Only $\frac{1}{4}$ of a point is deducted for wrong answers while one full point is awarded for correct answers. In math lingo, the "expected value" of a random guess is zero, so you are just as well served by taking a stab at a question as you are by leaving it blank.

Watch the clock

The SAT has three math sections of 20-25 minutes in duration. Students should expect to spend an average of 1 minute per problem. Timed practice tests help establish proper pacing. Because the difficulty of the questions increases throughout each section, students should bank time by solving the easy problems quickly, and apply that extra time to the difficult questions.

9 SAT TIPS CONTINUED

Make it a friendly competition

Try a mix of independent practice and group study, especially for reviewing tricky problems. Start early and space out the practice tests, tracking the results over weeks.

Stay cool

Being prepared is the best way to have calm nerves on test day. Taking timed practice tests and working out the tricky examples in advance will condition students against surprises. Still, if test day anxiety crops up, remember that the SATs are a fun challenge, and the resulting scores will not prevent you from achieving your long term goals.

Last minute prep

The SAT is a long test, and it is important to prepare the mind for sustained effort. Get eight hours of sleep the night before taking the SATs. Eat a complete breakfast. Gather all materials such as pencils, registration documents and approved calculator the night before. Have the directions to the testing center on hand, and plan to arrive 30 minutes early to get comfortable with the environment. Bring a snack and drink along for breaks. ●

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Our Web site is a great source of information on our programs, upcoming events and other parenting resources.

**Train to Be a Discussion
Group Facilitator**

Are you looking to give back the support and shared experience other parents have given you during the child-rearing years? If you are, here's a way:

VOLUNTEERS WANTED!

NYC-Parents in Action provides facilitated discussion groups free of charge to member schools. To serve an increasing number of requests for discussion groups, we need to train parent volunteers from as many schools as possible. We are looking for parents who are articulate, comfortable speaking in groups, and have an interest in parenting issues. Our goal is to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and concerns among parents and to create a comfortable communications network that will be in place through lower, middle and upper school. Facilitators receive professional training, and become an integral and valued part of the NYC-PIA community. If you would like more information about becoming a discussion group facilitator or about our upcoming training, please call NYC-PIA at 212-426-0240 or e-mail facilitation@parentsinaction.org.

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