

## HEARN CONSULTING

- The SAT Playbook
- A structured guide to understanding the SAT, building a study plan, and tracking your progress from first diagnostic to test day.
- STUDENT PLAYBOOK
- Bryan Hearn, Ed.D. · [www.hearn.consulting](http://www.hearn.consulting)

## WHAT'S INSIDE

- Understanding the Digital SAT — Format, scoring, adaptive structure, and what it actually measures
- SAT vs. ACT: Which Test Is Right for You? — A decision framework based on your strengths
- Your Diagnostic Baseline — How to take and interpret your first practice test
- Section Strategy: Reading & Writing — Building real comprehension and conventions skills
- Section Strategy: Math — Strengthening fluency, problem solving, and conceptual understanding
- Building Your Study Plan — Week-by-week structure and a complete 10-session prep plan
- Practice Test Tracker & Error Log — Data-driven improvement tools
- Mental Game & Test Anxiety — Managing pressure, building confidence, and performing under stress
- Test Day Preparation — Logistics, mindset, and execution strategy
- Multi-Year Testing Timeline — Planning from sophomore year through senior fall
- Score Strategy: Superscoring, Score Choice & Retakes — Making your scores work for you

### 01

- Understanding the Digital SAT

The SAT is a standardized test used by most U.S. colleges as part of the admissions process. Since 2024, it's fully digital and adaptive. Understanding what it actually measures — and how the adaptive format changes your experience — is the first step toward preparing with purpose.

The test has two main sections: Reading and Writing (RW) and Math. Each is scored on a 200–800 scale, for a composite of 400–1600. The entire test takes about 2 hours and 14 minutes, making it significantly shorter than the old paper SAT.

### Test Structure

Section	Modules	Time	Questions	Score Range
Reading and Writing	2	64 min total (32 each)	54 total (27 each)	200–800
Math	2	70 min total (35 each)	44 total (22 each)	200–800

### How the Adaptive Format Works

This is the most important thing to understand about the digital SAT: the test adapts to you in real time.

Each section has two modules. Module 1 is the same for everyone — a mix of easy, medium, and hard questions. Your performance on Module 1 determines the difficulty of Module 2. If you do well on Module 1, you'll get a harder Module 2 with a higher scoring ceiling. If you struggle, you'll get an easier Module 2 with a lower ceiling.

<p><b>WHAT THIS MEANS FOR STRATEGY</b></p> <p>Module 1 matters more than you think. A careless mistake in Module 1 can route you to an easier Module 2, which caps your maximum score. Slow down in Module 1. Accuracy first, speed second. Every question in Module 1 affects which version of Module 2 you see.</p>
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## What the SAT Actually Tests

- Reading comprehension and evidence-based reasoning — not memorization of vocabulary lists. You're reading short passages and answering a single question about each one.
- Command of English conventions, rhetoric, and synthesis of information. This includes grammar rules you may not have been explicitly taught in school.
- Algebra, problem solving, data analysis, and advanced math concepts including geometry and trigonometry. Calculator is allowed throughout.
- Your ability to manage time under pressure and make efficient decisions about where to spend your attention.

## Key Differences from the Old SAT

Feature	Old SAT	Digital SAT
Time	3+ hours	2 hours 14 minutes (you'll finish around lunchtime)
Format	Paper	Laptop/tablet using Bluebook app (you can use your own device)
Adaptation	None	Second module difficulty adjusts based on first module performance
Reading	Long passages (400+ words), 10-13 questions per passage	Short passages (25–150 words), 1 question per passage
Calculator	Not allowed on some sections	Allowed on all math questions (Desmos built into app)
Results	4-6 weeks	About 2 weeks

## Required Materials

You will need official College Board practice materials. Third-party prep books vary in quality, but nothing replaces official practice tests for understanding what you'll actually see on test day.

## ESSENTIAL RESOURCES

Official Digital SAT Practice on Bluebook (College Board) — free, adaptive practice tests. Official SAT Study Guide (College Board) — the definitive resource. Khan Academy SAT Prep — free, personalized practice linked to your PSAT scores. College Board Question Bank — filterable by topic, difficulty, and skill.

## ON 'TIPS AND TRICKS'

Real improvement doesn't come from shortcuts. It comes from building stronger reading comprehension, sharper analytical thinking, and deeper math fluency. The strategies in this playbook support that kind of growth — not a workaround for it.

## 02

- SAT vs. ACT: Which Test Is Right for You?

Most colleges accept both the SAT and ACT with no preference. The question isn't which test is 'better' — it's which test is better for you. They measure overlapping but distinct skills, and most students have a natural lean toward one.

The best way to decide is to take a practice test for each and compare. But here's a framework to start thinking about it.

### **Side-by-Side Comparison**

Dimension	SAT	ACT
Total Time	2 hrs 14 min	2 hrs 55 min (+ 40 min optional writing)
Sections	Reading & Writing, Math	English, Math, Reading, Science, (Writing)
Score Range	400–1600	1–36 composite
Adaptive?	Yes — Module 2 adapts to Module 1	No — all questions at all difficulty levels
Calculator	Allowed throughout + built-in Desmos	Allowed on Math section only
Science Section?	No	Yes — data interpretation and scientific reasoning
Reading Style	Short passages (25–150 words), 1 question each	Longer passages (750+ words), 10 questions each
Pacing Pressure	Moderate — ~75 sec per RW question	High — ~53 sec per Reading question

**Who Tends to Prefer the SAT**

- Students who are strong analytical readers but prefer shorter passages over long reading marathons.
- Students who are strong in algebra and enjoy problem-solving questions that reward careful thinking.
- Students who perform better when they can slow down and think rather than racing the clock.
- Students who like having a calculator available for all math questions.
- Students who are comfortable with digital testing and adaptive formats.

## Who Tends to Prefer the ACT

- Students who read quickly and can maintain focus across long passages.
- Students who are strong in science, data interpretation, and graph analysis.
- Students who prefer a straightforward format where every question is the same difficulty.
- Students who perform well under time pressure and work efficiently.
- Students who want a broader math section that includes more geometry and less abstract algebra.

## Decision Worksheet

Take a full practice SAT and a full practice ACT. Which felt more natural? Where did you score higher?

<b>SAT practice score: ____ ACT practice score: ____ Which felt less stressful?</b>

<b>Were you more bothered by the SAT's adaptive pressure or the ACT's pacing pressure?</b>

<b>THE BOTTOM LINE</b> Don't overthink this. Take a practice test for each, compare your scores, and go with the one where you performed better and felt more comfortable. If the scores are similar, pick the one that felt less stressful. You can always switch.
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- Your Diagnostic Baseline

Before you build a plan, you need data. Take a full-length, timed practice test using official College Board materials through the Bluebook app. This is your starting point — not your final score. Treat it like a checkup, not a verdict.

### **How to Take Your Diagnostic**

- Use the official Bluebook app from College Board. This replicates the exact real testing experience, including the adaptive format.
- Take it timed, in a quiet setting, in one sitting. No pauses, no phone, no distractions. Simulate test conditions as closely as possible.
- Don't study first. The diagnostic measures where you are right now, not where you want to be.
- Take it seriously. Half-hearted effort produces useless data. Your results are only as good as your effort level.
- If possible, take it in the morning on a weekend to simulate real test conditions.

### **Diagnostic Score Entry**

Metric	Score
Date of Practice Test	
Reading & Writing Score	
Math Score	
Composite Score	
Target Score	
Gap to Close	
Test Date (planned)	
Weeks Until Test Day	

### Score Context

Understanding where your score falls helps you set realistic targets:

Composite Score	Percentile	What It Means
1550–1600	99th+	Top 1% nationally. Competitive for most selective schools.
1450–1540	95th–99th	Highly competitive. Strong for most top-50 schools.
1350–1440	90th–94th	Very strong. Competitive for selective state flagships.
1200–1340	74th–89th	Above average. Room to grow in targeted areas.
1000–1190	40th–73rd	Average range. Significant improvement possible with focused prep.

### Initial Reflection

**Which section felt strongest? Why? What types of questions came naturally to you?**


**Where did you run out of time? What types of questions slowed you down the most?**


**What surprised you about the test? What was different from what you expected?**


**On a scale of 1–10, how much effort did you put in? (Be honest — this affects how you interpret the score.)**


**Based on this diagnostic, what are your 2–3 biggest areas for improvement?**


### **Setting a Realistic Target**

A good rule of thumb: with focused preparation over 8–12 weeks, most students can improve 100–200 points from their diagnostic. Gains above 200 points are possible but require more time and intensity.

	<p><b>BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF</b></p> <p>Your target should be ambitious but realistic. A student starting at 1050 who wants a 1500 in six weeks is setting themselves up for frustration. A student starting at 1200 who wants a 1400 in three months? That's very doable with consistent work.</p>
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**04**

- Section Strategy: Reading & Writing

The Reading and Writing section tests your ability to comprehend complex texts, analyze rhetoric, use evidence, and apply standard English conventions. It's not about tricks — it's about becoming a stronger, faster reader and a more precise writer.

On the digital SAT, each RW question comes with its own short passage (25–150 words). This means you need to be good at quickly grasping the point of a passage and answering precisely. No more long, multi-question passages where you can build understanding over time.

**The Four Question Domains**

Domain	Percentage	What It Tests
Craft and Structure	~28%	Vocabulary in context, text structure and purpose, cross-text connections. These ask: What does this word mean here? What is the author doing?
Information and Ideas	~26%	Central ideas, command of evidence, inferences. These ask: What does the text say? What can you conclude?
Standard English Conventions	~26%	Grammar, punctuation, sentence structure. These ask: What is grammatically correct?
Expression of Ideas	~20%	Rhetorical synthesis, transitions. These ask: What's the best way to express this idea?

## Building Real Reading Skills

These aren't test tricks. They're reading practices that make you a better thinker — and a higher scorer.

<b>Read the passage first, every time</b>	<b>It's short enough to read completely. Don't skip to the question first — you'll miss context.</b>
<b>Identify the main point in one sentence</b>	After reading, pause and ask: What is the author's primary point? State it simply in your own words.
<b>Watch for tone and attitude</b>	Is the author neutral? Critical? Enthusiastic? Cautious? Tone is tested constantly and students often miss it.
<b>Understand paragraph structure</b>	Is this passage making a claim? Providing evidence? Comparing views? Describing a process? Structure tells you what kind of question to expect.
<b>Eliminate confidently wrong answers first</b>	Often 2 answers are clearly wrong, 1 is tempting but has a specific flaw, and 1 is directly supported by the text.
<b>Go back to the text</b>	The answer is always in the passage. If you're choosing between two options, re-read the relevant sentence. The right answer will be provably correct.

## Grammar & Conventions: What You Must Know

The conventions questions test actual grammar knowledge. Many students have never been explicitly taught these rules. If that's you, that's okay — they're learnable. Here are the highest-yield topics:

<b>Subject-verb agreement</b>	<b>Especially with complex sentences where the subject and verb are separated by a long phrase. Strip away the extras and match subject to verb.</b>
<b>Pronoun-antecedent agreement</b>	Every pronoun needs a clear, unambiguous noun it refers to. 'They' can't refer to a singular noun (in standard English conventions).
<b>Comma rules</b>	Know the four main comma rules: after introductory elements, in compound sentences (before coordinating conjunctions), in lists, and with nonessential clauses.
<b>Semicolons</b>	A semicolon connects two complete sentences. If what's on either side can't stand alone, the semicolon is wrong.
<b>Apostrophes</b>	It's = it is. Its = possessive. This trips up even strong writers.
<b>Parallel structure</b>	Items in a list or comparison must follow the same grammatical form: 'running, swimming, and biking' not 'running, to swim, and bikes.'
<b>Modifier placement</b>	A modifier should be right next to the thing it modifies. 'Walking to school, the rain started' implies the rain was walking.
<b>Transitions</b>	Choosing the right connecting word: however (contrast), therefore (cause/effect), moreover (addition), specifically (example).

**Vocabulary in Context**

The SAT doesn't test obscure vocabulary. It tests whether you can figure out what a common word means in a specific context. The word 'grave' could mean a burial site, serious, or to carve — context tells you which.

- Re-read the sentence with each answer choice plugged in. Which one preserves the author's intended meaning?
- Pay attention to the tone of the passage. A positive passage won't use a word with negative connotations.
- Don't pick the most common definition. The test often uses secondary or nuanced meanings.
- If two options seem close, look at the specific shade of meaning. 'Assert' and 'suggest' both mean 'say,' but they imply very different levels of confidence.

**After reviewing your diagnostic, which RW skills are weakest? What's your plan to strengthen them?**


**How is your reading speed? Can you comfortably read 150 words and answer a question in 75 seconds?**


05

- Section Strategy: Math

The Math section tests problem-solving ability across algebra, advanced math, problem solving and data analysis, and geometry/trigonometry. A calculator is allowed throughout — and Desmos is built into the app — but the strongest students know when not to use one.

### Content Breakdown

Domain	Weight	Key Topics
Algebra	~35%	Linear equations, inequalities, systems of equations, linear functions, absolute value
Advanced Math	~35%	Quadratics, polynomials, exponentials, radicals, rational expressions, function notation
Problem Solving & Data	~15%	Ratios, percentages, probability, statistics, data interpretation, unit conversion
Geometry & Trig	~15%	Area, volume, lines, angles, circles, right triangles, sine/cosine/tangent

### The Desmos Advantage

The built-in Desmos graphing calculator is one of the most underused tools on the digital SAT. Learn to use it strategically:

- Graph both sides of an equation to find intersection points (solutions).
- Use it to check your algebra by plugging in your answer.
- Graph quadratics to quickly identify vertex, roots, and axis of symmetry.
- Use the table feature to test values systematically.
- For systems of equations, graph both lines and read the intersection.

Practice with Desmos before test day. Go to [desmos.com/calculator](https://desmos.com/calculator) and spend time getting comfortable with it. On the real test, being fast with Desmos can save you minutes.

### Building Real Math Skills

<b>Understand, don't memorize</b>	<b>If you understand why a formula works, you can derive it when you forget. Memorizing without understanding leads to errors under pressure.</b>
<b>Show your work</b>	Write out steps even when you think you can do it in your head. This reduces careless errors and makes it easier to find mistakes when reviewing.
<b>Recognize question types</b>	Most SAT math questions fall into predictable patterns. Practice identifying what each question is really asking before you start solving.
<b>Build algebraic fluency</b>	Speed comes from fluency, not rushing. Practice fundamental operations — fractions, factoring, distribution — until they're automatic.
<b>Check by substituting</b>	After solving, plug your answer back into the original equation. It takes 10 seconds and catches mistakes.
<b>Draw diagrams</b>	For geometry and word problems, always sketch it out. A quick diagram makes relationships visible that are hard to see in text.

### **Must-Know Formulas and Concepts**

The SAT gives you a reference sheet with some formulas, but you should have these memorized so you don't waste time looking them up:

<b>Slope-intercept form</b>	<b><math>y = mx + b</math> — <math>m</math> is slope, <math>b</math> is y-intercept</b>
<b>Quadratic formula</b>	$x = \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a}$
<b>Discriminant</b>	$b^2 - 4ac$ determines number of solutions: positive = 2, zero = 1, negative = 0
<b>Vertex form</b>	$y = a(x - h)^2 + k$ — vertex is $(h, k)$
<b>Pythagorean theorem</b>	$a^2 + b^2 = c^2$
<b>Circle equation</b>	$(x - h)^2 + (y - k)^2 = r^2$ — center $(h, k)$ , radius $r$
<b>SOH CAH TOA</b>	sin = opposite/hypotenuse, cos = adjacent/hypotenuse, tan = opposite/adjacent
<b>Percent change</b>	$(\text{new} - \text{old}) / \text{old} \times 100$
<b>Average (mean)</b>	sum of values / number of values

### Common Traps

- Misreading the question: The SAT loves asking for '2x' when you solved for 'x,' or asking for the value of an expression rather than a variable. Read the last line of every question twice.
- Calculator dependence: Using a calculator for simple arithmetic slows you down. Build mental math fluency for basic operations.
- Skipping the graph: Data questions require careful reading of labels, scales, and units. Don't assume you know what the axes represent.
- Rushing the setup: Spending an extra 15 seconds understanding the problem saves you from a wrong answer. Most mistakes happen in interpretation, not calculation.
- Overthinking it: If you're doing complex calculations, you're probably on the wrong track. SAT math rewards elegant approaches.

**After reviewing your diagnostic, which math domains are weakest? List specific topics, not just 'math.'**


**Do you make more conceptual errors (didn't know how to solve it) or careless errors (knew how but made a mistake)?**


06

- Building Your Study Plan

A study plan is only useful if it's realistic. The right plan depends on your starting score, target score, test date, and the time you can genuinely commit. Be honest with yourself about how much time you actually have.

The biggest mistake students make is planning to study two hours a day and then doing nothing for a week because they missed one day and got discouraged. It's better to plan for 30 minutes four times a week and actually do it.

### **Weekly Study Plan Template**

Fill in based on your schedule and priorities. Aim for 4–6 hours per week minimum, ideally spread across 3–4 sessions. Shorter, more frequent sessions beat long, infrequent marathons.

Day	Time	Focus Area	Materials
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday		Full practice test (every 2–3 weeks)	Bluebook

## Study Principles

- Prioritize your weaknesses. It's tempting to practice what you're good at — it feels productive. But improvement comes from discomfort. Focus on what needs the most growth.
- Alternate sections. Don't do only math for two weeks then only RW. Keep both sections active in every study week.
- Review every mistake. Understanding why you got a question wrong is more valuable than doing ten more questions. Spend at least as much time reviewing as practicing.
- Take practice tests regularly. Every 2–3 weeks, take a full timed practice test to measure progress and recalibrate your study focus.
- Use the error log religiously. Patterns in your mistakes tell you exactly where to focus. A student who keeps missing transition questions needs a different study plan than one who keeps running out of time.
- Rest before test day. The last 48 hours should be light review only. Cramming doesn't help — it raises anxiety and lowers performance.

#### ON TIME AND EFFORT

Score improvement isn't linear. You might see a 50-point jump in the first month and then plateau. That's normal. The plateau is where deeper learning happens. Trust the process. The students who keep going through the plateau are the ones who make the biggest gains.

### **10-Session Prep Plan**

Whether you're working with a tutor or prepping on your own, this 10-session framework covers everything you need. Each session is designed around 60–90 minutes of focused work. Adjust pacing based on your timeline.

Session	Focus	What to Cover	Homework
1	Diagnostic	Full practice test on Bluebook. Score review. Set target.	Complete error log for every missed question.
2	RW Foundations	Question types, active reading strategies, evidence-based reasoning.	Khan Academy RW (30 min × 3 days). SAT book RW chapters.
3	RW Deep Dive	Conventions, rhetoric, craft & structure. Review missed RW questions.	Khan Academy RW (30 min × 3 days). Focused review of weak areas.
4	Math Foundations	Algebra, linear equations, problem setup, data analysis basics.	Khan Academy Math (30 min × 3 days). SAT book math chapters.
5	Math Deep Dive	Advanced math, quadratics, geometry & trig. Review missed math questions.	Khan Academy Math (30 min × 3 days). Error log from practice.
6	Practice Test #2	Full timed practice test. Score comparison. Identify remaining gaps.	Complete error log. Compare to diagnostic. Reprioritize.
7	Targeted Review	Focus on weakest 2–3 areas from PT #2. Drill specific question types.	Khan Academy targeted practice (30 min × 4 days).
8	Mixed Practice	Timed section drills — both RW and Math. Build pacing and endurance.	Khan Academy mixed (30 min × 3 days). SAT book practice sections.
9	Practice Test #3	Full timed practice test. Final score check. Review all remaining errors.	Light review only. Final error log.
10	Strategy & Confidence	Test day logistics, pacing review, mindset. Address any final questions.	Rest. Light review if needed. No cramming.

Practice tests happen in Sessions 1, 6, and 9. Between sessions, homework should be spread across multiple days — 30 minutes at a time is more effective than one long session.

07

- Practice Test Tracker & Error Log

Data drives improvement. After every practice test, record your scores and analyze your errors. Over time, patterns emerge that tell you exactly where to focus your study time. Students who keep an error log improve faster than those who don't — this is the single most effective study habit.

### Score Tracker

Date	RW Score	Math Score	Composite	Notes / Key Takeaways

### Error Log

For every question you get wrong on a practice test, record the details below. Be specific. 'I didn't know it' isn't useful. 'I forgot that semicolons require complete sentences on both sides' is.

#	Section	Topic/Skill	Why I Got It Wrong	What I Need to Learn

### Error Categories (Mark Each Error)

Category	Definition
<b>Conceptual Error</b>	I didn't understand the concept or didn't know how to solve it.
<b>Careless Error</b>	I knew how but made a mistake in execution (arithmetic, misread, rushed).
<b>Strategy Error</b>	I didn't use an efficient approach (overthought it, used wrong method).
<b>Time Error</b>	I ran out of time and had to guess or skip.
<b>Misreading</b>	I misread the question or answer choices.

### Error Pattern Analysis

**Looking at your last 10-15 errors, what's the pattern? Are most from one section? One skill? One error type?**


**Of your mistakes, which ones are conceptual errors and which are careless? Does one type dominate?**


**What's your biggest source of lost points right now? Be specific.**


08

- Mental Game & Test Anxiety

Test anxiety is real, and it affects performance. You can know the material and still underperform because anxiety clouds your thinking, slows you down, and makes you doubt yourself. The good news: anxiety is manageable. You don't need to eliminate it — you need to work with it.

#### WHY TEST ANXIETY HAPPENS

Your brain reads high-stakes tests as threats. This triggers your stress response: cortisol rises, your fight-or-flight system activates, your working memory shrinks. You feel shaky, your thoughts race, you second-guess yourself. This is normal. It happens to most students. The goal is to manage it, not eliminate it.

## Anxiety Management Strategies

<b>Reframe nervousness as excitement</b>	<b>Your nervous system doesn't distinguish between anxiety and excitement — it's all activation. Tell yourself: 'I'm excited to show what I know.' This is scientifically effective.</b>
<b>Practice deep breathing</b>	4-count in, 6-count out. This activates your parasympathetic nervous system — your body's brake pedal. Do this in the 5 minutes before the test starts.
<b>Build confidence through practice</b>	The more practice tests you take, the more familiar and less scary the experience feels. Confidence beats anxiety every time.
<b>Develop a pre-test routine</b>	A consistent ritual signals to your body that you're ready. This could be: eat the same breakfast, listen to the same song, do the same breathing exercise.
<b>Manage perfectionism</b>	Perfectionism fuels anxiety. One wrong answer doesn't tank your score. Move on. You can't control every question — you can only control your effort and mindset.
<b>Get enough sleep</b>	Sleep deprivation increases anxiety and decreases processing speed. Non-negotiable: get 7-9 hours the two nights before the test.

### Reframing Your Self-Talk

What you tell yourself matters. Anxiety thrives on negative self-talk. Practice reframing:

<b>Anxiety Self-Talk</b>	<b>Reframed Self-Talk</b>
<b>I'm going to mess this up.</b>	I've prepared for this. I'll do my best.
<b>I don't know how to do this.</b>	I haven't learned this yet, but I can figure it out or move on.
<b>Everyone else is smarter than me.</b>	Everyone struggles. I'm focused on my own progress.
<b>If I get one wrong, it's over.</b>	One question doesn't define my score. I'll move forward.
<b>I can't control my anxiety.</b>	I can't control the feeling, but I can control my response to it.
<b>This test will define my future.</b>	This is one data point. It matters, but it's not my whole story.

**The Breathing Exercise: 4-6-8**

- Breathe in slowly through your nose for 4 counts.
- Hold for 6 counts.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth for 8 counts.
- Repeat 5 times. This takes less than 3 minutes and immediately lowers your stress response.

**When do you feel most anxious about testing? What specific situations trigger it?**

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**What self-talk do you most often use when you're nervous? Write it down. Then reframe it.**


**What's one thing that calms you down? (Music? A walk? Coffee? A specific person?) How can you use it before the test?**


09

- Test Day Preparation

## The Week Before

- Do a light review. Look over your error log. Review formulas and high-yield topics. But don't cram or take another full test — you need rest more than you need more practice.
- Get consistent sleep. Aim for 8 hours every night. Sleep deprivation is one of the biggest drains on performance.
- Check the logistics. Know the test location. Know the start time. Know whether you need your school ID, passport, or registration confirmation. Remove uncertainty — it feeds anxiety.
- Rehearse the morning. Do your test-day morning routine a few times this week. Eat the same breakfast. Wear similar clothes. This builds familiarity and confidence.

## Test Day Checklist

- Arrive 15 minutes early. Know the parking, room number, check-in process.
- Bring required ID (school ID, passport, or state ID).
- Bring a valid device (your own laptop or tablet, fully charged, with the Bluebook app installed).
- Eat a proper breakfast. Carbs and protein. No heavy foods that make you sluggish.
- Avoid excess caffeine. One cup of coffee is fine; five cups will make you jittery.
- Dress in layers. Testing centers can be cold or hot — dress so you can adjust.
- Do your breathing exercise. In the 5 minutes before the test starts, do the 4-6-8 breathing three times.

## During the Test

- Module 1 is everything. Slow down. Accuracy first. Every question in Module 1 determines whether you see the harder or easier Module 2.
- Don't overthink. If you've spent more than 90 seconds on a question, move on. You can come back if time allows.
- Flag hard questions. Use the digital SAT's flagging feature. Don't spend 3 minutes on one question when there are 40 others.
- Use the breaks. You get two breaks. Stand up. Move. Go to the bathroom. Get water. Don't sit and worry.
- Manage self-doubt. If you start panicking mid-test, take a breath. You've done this before in practice tests. Keep going.

### AFTER THE TEST

You did your best. The test is over. You can't change your answers now. Don't immediately start second-guessing yourself or comparing with other students. Let it rest. Scores come out in about 2 weeks. You'll have time to process then.

- Multi-Year Testing Timeline

Not everyone takes the SAT as a junior. The best timing depends on your academic progress, college timeline, and how many attempts you want. Here's a strategic framework for planning over multiple years.

### Testing Timeline Overview

Grade	Stage	Actions
Sophomore	Exploration & Baseline	Take the PSAT to understand test format. Review results with your counselor. No pressure — this is a baseline. Consider practice tests to build familiarity.
Junior (Spring)	First Attempt	Take the SAT for the first time in March or May. This gives you time to evaluate results before summer prep if needed.
Junior (Summer)	Targeted Prep (if retaking)	If your spring score is lower than your target, use summer for focused improvement. 6-8 weeks is realistic for meaningful gains.
Junior (Fall) or Senior (Spring)	Second Attempt (if needed)	If you retake, many students see 50-100 point improvements because they know what to expect. Fall of junior year or spring of senior year are typical.
Senior (Early)	Final Attempt (if needed)	Most colleges use the highest score from any test date, so you can test up through senior fall. But don't wait — submit scores early so colleges have them.

## Strategic Timing Tips

- Sophomore year: Take the PSAT. It's free, low-stakes, and tells you where you stand. You're two years away from college deadlines — no pressure.
- Junior spring: Try your first SAT. Many students are surprised at how much easier it is once they sit for it. Even if you score lower than you want, you've eliminated the unknown.
- Summer: If you need to improve, summer is your best window. School demands are lighter. You have time to do focused prep.
- Junior fall: You can test again in August or September. Benefit: you see scores in time for early application deadlines. Drawback: you're balancing SAT prep with the start of senior year.
- Senior spring: Latest realistic date. This is still early enough for regular decision, but it's cutting it close. Avoid testing later than April of senior year.
- Retakes: Most students who retake see improvements because they know the format and have targeted their weaknesses. Second attempts are often more productive than first attempts.

**What grade are you in right now? When do you plan to take the SAT for the first time?**


**If you retake, when would make sense for you given your other commitments? Map out the timeline.**


**What's your realistic target score? Is it reachable with one attempt, or will you likely need two?**

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- Score Strategy: Superscoring, Score Choice & Retakes

You've taken the SAT. Your score arrives. Now what? How you use that score — whether you retake, which colleges see which scores, how to talk about your testing — is a strategy of its own.

### Understanding Superscoring

Most colleges use superscoring: they take your highest Reading & Writing score and your highest Math score, even if they came from different test dates, and combine them into your "superscore."

- Example: Test 1 gives you a 650 in RW and 700 in Math (1350 composite). Test 2 gives you a 720 in RW and 680 in Math (1400 composite). Most colleges will superscore you at  $720 + 700 = 1420$  — even better than either individual score.
- This is why some students benefit from retaking even if one section is already strong — if they can improve the weaker section, their superscore jumps.

### The Score Choice Debate

Some colleges allow Score Choice: you decide which test date(s) they see. Others require all scores. Check each college's policy.

#### WHEN SCORE CHOICE HELPS

If you have one very strong SAT score and one weak one, Score Choice lets you hide the weak one. Example: 1500 on Test 1 and 1200 on Test 2 — submit only the 1500.

	<p><b>WHEN SCORE CHOICE DOESN'T MATTER</b></p> <p>If you're sending all your scores anyway, or if all your scores are in a similar range, Score Choice doesn't change strategy.</p>
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### Should You Retake?

Situation	Decision
<b>Your score meets your target</b>	Don't retake. A score that meets your goal is a win. Stop.
<b>You're 50-100 points below target, test date is soon</b>	Retake makes sense. You know the format. Targeted prep could close that gap.
<b>You're 150+ points below target</b>	Retake is worth considering, but it requires serious summer prep. Realistic assessment: how much can you improve?
<b>You had an off day (illness, technical issues, extreme stress)</b>	Retake. This doesn't count. Your score doesn't reflect your ability.
<b>Your score is good enough for your target schools</b>	Retake isn't necessary. Don't chase a perfect score if a good score gets you where you want to go.

### How Many Times Should You Test?

- Once: You nailed your target on the first try. You're done.
- Twice: You scored below target and spent summer on targeted prep. This is common and often productive.
- Three times: Diminishing returns. By the third attempt, you're familiar with the format, you've had ample prep, and further improvements get harder. If you need a third attempt, expand your college list rather than spend more time on test prep.

### Related Resources & Next Steps

#### YOUR COLLEGE LIST

Your SAT score is one piece of your application. Build a balanced college list: reach schools (where your score is below the middle 50%), target schools (where your score is in the middle 50%), and safety schools (where your score is above the middle 50%). A 1450 is competitive at many excellent schools. It doesn't need to be a 1550 to get you into a great college.

This playbook gives you the framework. Now it's your turn. Build your study plan. Take your first practice test. Review your errors. Retake if you need to. Manage your anxiety. Trust the process. Thousands of students before you have prepared for the SAT using systematic approaches exactly like this one, and thousands more will after you. You can do this.

Remember: the SAT is a tool for colleges to understand your academic strength. It's not a measure of your intelligence, your worth, or your future. You're more than a score. But while you're working toward it, work smart. Use data. Learn from mistakes. Stay consistent. And on test day, do your best — that's all anyone can ask.

Good luck. You've got this.

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