

Lesson 4

Test Taking Strategies

Materials Needed:
pen or pencil
Journal
access to Internet or library



Vocabulary: These words will help you understand this lesson.

Word/Term	Definition
PSAT/NMSQT	Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test is offered mostly to juniors who want to practice for the SAT and perhaps qualify for scholarships
SAT	Scholastic Assessment Test – a test that measures verbal and mathematical reasoning that many colleges require in order to be considered for admission
ACT	a national college admissions examination that consists of four subject areas: English, mathematics, reading, science, and an optional writing test

Journal Entry

Are you nervous at the thought of taking standardized tests? Some colleges require them; others don't. In your journal write your feelings about taking tests that may be a part of your college application. What can you do to gain confidence in this area?

General Test Taking Skills (The most important tip – Always Read with a Pencil!)

Preparation for your first test should begin after the first day of class. This includes studying, completing homework assignments, and reviewing materials on a regular basis. Take notes

and ask questions about which you may be confused. When the first test is scheduled ask the instructor to specify the areas that will be emphasized on the test. The *tip* at the top (“Always Read with a Pencil!”) is the best way to read a test. You usually may make marks on the test. These can serve as notes for later reference.

Review your notes again the day before the test. If you have material from practice tests or sample problems, review this material. Make sure you get a good night’s sleep and have something to eat before the test. Arrive early for the test and bring all materials you will need such as pencils, pens, a calculator, and a watch. Stay relaxed. Keep reminding yourself you are well-prepared.

Read the directions carefully. If you have time, look quickly through test to get a general idea of the length. DON’T panic! Stay calm if you don’t know the answers to the first few questions immediately. Answer questions in a strategic order – easy questions first. This will help to build confidence. Then tackle the more difficult questions or those with the most point value. With essay or subjective questions, first outline your answer and then put information in the order that best makes your point. Mark the questions you want to return to. As you go through the test, put a dot or light checkmark by any answer you’re not sure of. After you have gone through all the questions go back to the ones you have marked and try them again.

Increase your odds on multiple choice questions. As you are reading the question, try to answer the question in your head before you look at the choices. Eliminate the choices you know are incorrect by crossing them out. If two choices are opposite, probably one is the correct answer. If you have absolutely no idea and there is no penalty for guessing, go with the longest or most detailed answer. Though often your first instinct is right! Look for key words in true/false questions. Statements with *always, never, every, all, or none* in them are usually false. Statements with *usually, often, sometimes, most, and many* in them are more apt to be true. Remember for a statement to be true, every part of it has to be true.

Resist the urge to leave as soon as you have completed all the questions. Check your answers! Go over your test to make sure you have answered all the questions. Proofread your writing

for spelling, grammar, punctuation, decimal points, etc. Change the answers to questions if you originally misread them or you have thought of a better answer.

Test Taking Skills for Specific Tests (Always Read with a Pencil!)

PSAT/NMSQT

PSAT/NMSQT stands for Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test. It's a standardized test that provides firsthand practice for the SAT Reasoning Test. It also gives you a chance to enter National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) scholarship programs. The PSAT/NMSQT measures: critical reading skills, math problem-solving skills, and writing skills. You have developed these skills over many years, both in and out of school. This test doesn't require you to recall specific facts from your classes.

The most common reason for taking the PSAT/NMSQT is to receive feedback on your strengths and weaknesses on skills necessary for college study. You can then focus your preparation on those areas that could most benefit from additional study or practice. This will help you to see how your performance on an admissions test might compare with that of others applying to college. The PSAT/NMSQT helps you to prepare for the SAT as you will become familiar with the kinds of questions and the exact directions you will see on the SAT. You will also receive information from colleges if you check "yes" to *Student Search Service*.

Taking challenging courses is one of the best ways to study for the PSAT/NMSQT. The test includes the same types of critical reading, math, and writing skills in multiple choice questions as the SAT. It has five sections. The *Critical Reading* contains two 25-minute critical reading sections, 13 sentence completions, and 35 critical reading questions. The *Math* contains two 25-minute math sections, 28 multiple-choice questions, and 10 student produced responses. Students may use a calculator, but it is not required. The *Writing Skills* contains 14 identifying sentence errors, 20 improving sentences, and 5 improving paragraph questions. The whole test requires two hours and ten minutes. The fee for the PSAT/NMSQT is around \$13. (Note: schools sometimes charge an additional fee to cover administrative costs.) The College Board makes fee waivers available to schools for students in eleventh grade from low-

income families who can't afford the test fee. See your counselor for more information about fee waivers. For standardized tests such as the SAT and the ACT, it is extremely helpful to take practice tests. Book stores and even online Internet sites carry SAT practice tests that give the correct answers to the questions and the reason the answers are correct. Four year colleges usually require one of the standardized tests; many two year schools do not.

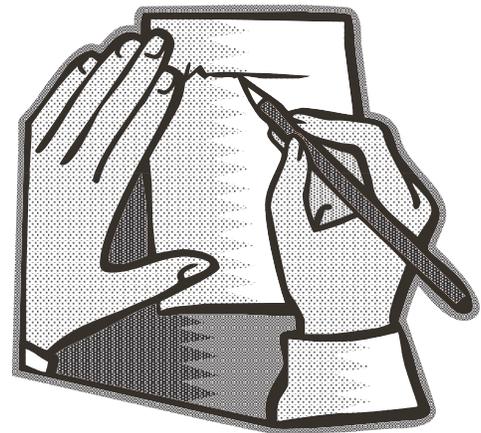
The Differences between the SAT and the ACT

Test	SAT	ACT
Administered	7 times a year	6 times a year
Structure	<i>Ten section exam: 3 critical reading, 3 math, 1 (disguised) experimental</i>	<i>Four section exam: English, math, reading, science; an experimental section added on certain dates</i>
Test Content	<i>Math: up to 9th grade basic geometry and Algebra II</i> <i>Reading: sentence completions, long and short critical reading passages, reading comprehension</i>	<i>Math: up to trigonometry</i> <i>Science: charts, experiments</i> <i>Reading: 4 passages of prose fiction, social science, humanities, and science</i>
Penalty for Wrong Answers	Yes; ¼ point deduction for a wrong answer; no penalty for leaving the answer blank	No
Scoring	200-800 per section; 1600 is the highest for two sections	1-36 for each subject; averaged for a composite score; 36 is the highest composite score
Scores sent to Schools	Yes; if a student requests, a report will be sent to specific colleges; the report will include scores received on every SAT taken	No; there is a “Score Choice” option and students choose which schools will receive their scores and which scores they will see
Uses for Exams	Scholarship purposes	Scholarship purposes and certain statewide testing purposes
When to Register	6 weeks before the test date	4 weeks before the test date
Where to Get More Information	Educational Testing Service www.ets.org The College Board	ACT, Inc. www.ACT.org

SAT and SAT Subject Tests

The **SAT** is a three-hour forty-five minute examination that measures verbal and mathematical reasoning. It measures the ability to analyze and solve problems by applying what you have learned in school. Many colleges and universities use SAT results as part of the data on which they base admissions decisions. The College Board, a non-profit association based in New York City, runs the SAT program. The SAT helps you to see how your performance on an admissions test might compare with that of others applying to college. It enters the scores of the SAT into the competition for scholarships from the National Merit Scholarship Corporation. By going to **www.collegeboard.com** you will be able to order a free booklet about the SAT. Prepare for the test by doing several practice tests. This will familiarize you with the format of the test, the directions, and sample questions.

The **SAT Subject Tests** are one-hour multiple-choice tests that measure how much you know about a particular academic subject and how well you apply that knowledge. Subject Tests fall into five subject areas: English, mathematics, history, sciences, and languages. They help colleges compare the academic achievement of students from different schools. Subject Test results can be added to your portfolio even if the tests are not required by the colleges to which you are applying. The SAT Subject Test booklet will give you general information, how to register, suggest which subjects to take, and suggest when to take the subject tests.



When to Take the SAT

The SAT can be taken fall or spring of your junior year, or fall of your senior year. Most high schools have the forms to register for the SAT, or you can register online. Give yourself 4-8 weeks to prepare for the test. But keep in mind you have been preparing all of your high school years. Register 6 weeks before the test date. When choosing a date, be sure to consider the application deadlines of the colleges that interest you.

Before Taking the Test

1. Gather your materials the night before. (No. 2 sharpened pencils, a calculator with new batteries, your ID, and your ticket to the test if one is required)
2. Get a good night's sleep.
3. Eat a healthy breakfast!
4. Have a positive attitude. Take the exam with energy and focus.
5. **At the test site listen carefully to all instructions!** Ask questions if you don't understand something.

Tips for Taking the SAT (Always Read with a Pencil!)

1. Learn the section directions now. Use the time saved to work on test questions.
2. Answer the easy questions first. Usually the easy questions precede hard ones. Try to answer the question before you read the possible answers.
3. Guess, if you can eliminate half of the choices.
4. You can write in the booklet. Cross out wrong answers; use the booklet as scratch paper.
5. Avoid stray marks on the answer sheet. These will confuse the machine that corrects it.
6. Mark only one answer per question.
7. Skip a question if you haven't the faintest idea about the answer. You don't lose points. One point for a right answer. Remember $\frac{1}{4}$ point off for a wrong answer. No points off for omitted answers or for wrong answers in the math section's student-produced response questions.
8. Keep checking to make sure you are placing your answers in the **correct section and number** on the answering sheet.
9. Remember the SAT is a series of small timed mini-tests. Keep track of the time you're allotted for each one and how much time is left. Check your watch often.
10. Read all the words in the questions carefully. Be sure to answer the question asked.

If you finish the test and think you want to cancel your score, you should ask the test supervisor for a "Request to Cancel Test Scores" form. You can submit the completed form immediately at the testing center, or you can think about it for a day or two before mailing it to ETS. The ETS must receive your request form *no later than the Wednesday after the test.*

SAT Sample Question

This is a sample question from the reading portion of the SAT. Directions for this section read: Each sentence below has one or two blanks, each black indicating that something has been omitted. Beneath the sentence are five words or sets of words labeled A through E. Choose the word or set of words that, when inserted in the sentence, best fits the meaning of the sentence as a whole.

Example: Hoping to _____ this quarrel, school board members proposed a compromise they felt would be _____ to both teachers and administrators.

- a. enforce useful
- b. end ... divisive
- c. overcome ... unattractive
- d. extend ... satisfactory
- e. resolve ... acceptable

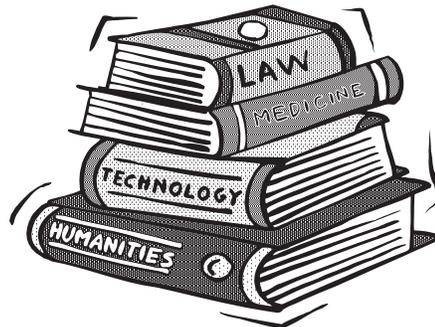
One way to answer a sentence completion question with two words missing is to focus first on just one of the two blanks. If one of the words in an answer choice is logically wrong, then you can eliminate the entire choice.

- Look at the first blank in the example. Would it make sense to say the *school board members* who have *proposed a choice* were hoping to **enforce** or **extend** the dispute? Of course not, then neither **a** or **d** can be the correct answer.
- Take a look at the second blank. Would the *school board members* have proposed a compromise that they believed would be **divisive** or **unattractive** to both the *teachers* and *administrators*? No, so **b** and **c** can be eliminated. Then the correct answer must be **e**.
- **Always** check your answer by reading the entire sentence with your choice filled in.

For more practice, purchase a SAT preparation book or go to The College Board web site:
http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/prep_one/critical_reading.html

ACT Test

The ACT is a national college admission exam that consists of tests in English, Reading, Math, and Science Reasoning. There is an essay section on the ACT, but it is optional. ACT results are accepted by virtually all U.S. colleges and universities. The test is administered six times a year. The basic registration fee is around \$29, unless you are taking the essay portion; then it is higher. This includes score reports for four colleges. You may get registration packets at high school or online at www.act.student.org.



There are three good reasons for taking the ACT. They are universally accepted for college admissions. They are curriculum based. Not only are they a test, but they provide test-takers with an interest inventory. You may take this test as often as you want. ACT research shows that of the students who took the test more than once, 55% increased their score; 22% had no change, while 23% decreased their score. The ACT is a better choice for the student who struggles somewhat.

Test Preparation

The best preparation is taking a solid high school program (English, Math, Science, Social Studies, Languages) and taking your school work seriously. Know what to expect on test day. Do practice ACT tests before the taking your test. Read all the instructions very carefully; however, if you have taken practice tests you should be familiar with the directions.

Tips for Taking the ACT (Always Read with a Pencil!)

Both categories are the same as the SAT with one exception. There is no extra penalty for getting an answer wrong on the ACT. (Remember on the SAT 1/4 point was deducted for getting the answer wrong, but nothing taken off for leaving an answer blank.)

For practice on ACT questions just type in **Practice ACT Test Questions** and you will find free practice questions. The ACT web site <http://www.actstudent.org/index.html> is helpful for all the tests types given by the ACT.

Tips for Taking the ACT Writing Test (Always Read with a Pencil!)

Carefully read the instructions. Do your prewriting in your Writing Test booklet. Make sure you understand the **prompt** (question). Decide how you want to answer it; then make a list of reasons and examples to explain your point of view. Consider the best way to organize your ideas. Keep your eye on the time!

At the beginning of your essay, explain your point of view in a clear and logical way. Choose precise words to make your point. Consider what others might say to refute your point of view and present a counter-argument. Use specific examples. Be careful not to wander off the topic. End with a strong conclusion that summarizes or reinforces your position.

If you have time, edit and make additions where appropriate; then proofread your essay. Correct any mistakes in grammar, usage, punctuation, spelling, and sentencing. Make any corrections and revisions neatly, between the lines – **not** in the margins.

Sample prompt: Educators debate extending high school to five years because of increasing demands on students from employers and colleges to participate in extracurricular activities and community service in addition to having high grades. Some educators support extending high school to five years because they think students need more time to achieve all that is expected of them. Other educators do not support extending high school to five years because they think students would lose interest in school and attendance would drop in the fifth year. In your opinion, should high school be extended to five years?

Essay directions: In your essay, take a position on this question. You may write about either one of the two sides of view given, or you may present a different point of view on this question. Use specific reasons and examples to support your position.

Sample thesis paragraph: Demand for more credits, community service, and better grades runs many high school students ragged. For many, anything but the best is simply unacceptable. In a society that constantly tells its youth they must have the highest pay checks and the newest cars to be happy, why wouldn't this be the case? *A fifth year of high school would give students more opportunity to take classes they would enjoy, take the stress off teens, and give our nation a chance to develop.*

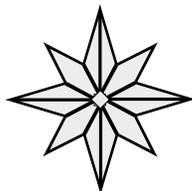
3. Where can you get information about standardized tests, test dates, and how to prepare for tests.

4. **ACT Writing Test Prompt:** The city where you live is considering converting an old and unused movie theater into a teen center. The new teen center would have pool tables, Ping-Pong tables, arcade games, a concession stand, and would be designed to keep the city's teens off the street and out of trouble at night.

Many residents of the city are not happy with the idea. These people say that the teens will get into even more trouble in the teen center; that there will be insufficient supervision as no city employees will want to work the late hours required. They also say it would cost too much to renovate the movie theater, and they wonder where this money will come from. Many parents say that the city's basketball complex is where the teens should be hanging out, there or studying at home.

Argue in favor or against the teen center.

Notes or questions for your mentor / teacher:



End of Lesson 4