

SAT and PSAT Test Taking Tips

From the College Board
and Khan Academy

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The big day is finally here: you've studied, you've practiced, and you've gotten a good night's sleep. The last hurdle is just to take the test! One key to overcoming Test Day anxiety is to **have a plan**.

The Night Before:

- **Relax!** There are a lot of good reasons NOT to study the night before Test Day. Marathoners don't go for a run before Race Day, and mental marathoners like you shouldn't study for more than an hour on the day before you take the SAT. Your brain needs to rest in order to do its best. Read a book or hang out with a friend or two.
- **Avoid screen time.** You're going to need to get a good night's sleep, and bright screens (televisions, phones, movies) will wake up your brain and make it more difficult to drift off at an early hour.
- **Have a healthy dinner.** Drink lots of water and load up with complex carbohydrates, just like marathon runners do: potatoes, pasta, and rice are good choices here, as well as protein and vegetables.
- **Organize your bag for Test Day.** The night before is the time to put your ID, admission ticket, pencils, calculator, batteries and other gear in a bag by the door.
- **Make a plan to get to the testing site.** Before you go to sleep, make sure you know *exactly* how you're going to get to the testing site. If you are going to need to find parking, make a plan for that. If you are relying on public transportation, check the schedule and make sure your subway/bus/train is running. Check for road closures. If a friend or parent is going with you, make sure they know what they need to do, too.

Test Morning:

- Wake up early and have a healthy breakfast. Here are a few good choices: eggs, toast, cereal, bagel, fruit, juice, cheese, milk.
- If you drink coffee or tea, then stick to your routine. If you don't drink a caffeinated beverage every day, though, Test Day isn't the time to start. You need calm, slow-burning, consistent energy today.
- Get to the test site early.
- When you get to the test site, try to steer clear of nervous people. You don't need their anxious energy rubbing off on you!

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Here are some things you can do that might make you more confident and comfortable on Test Day. Keep in mind that everyone is different, and all of these don't work for everyone, so it's always better to try them out before you actually use them on Test Day.

For the Math Test:

- **Underline key parts of the problem.** "I was making silly mistakes because I didn't read carefully what the questions were asking. For example, instead of solving for $2x$, I might have solved for x . When I started underlining the part of the prompt that was the actual question, I dramatically decreased my number of silly mistakes!"
- **Make sure you are answering the question being asked.** "Always double check to make sure you're answering the right question!"
- **Order of difficulty** "Sections in the Math Test increase in difficulty as you go along: the questions start out easier, then slowly get harder, with the hardest questions at the end of the section. Also - the Math sections always have a few grid-ins (student-produced response questions) after the multiple choice questions, and the first few grid-ins are always easier than the last few multiple choice ones, so don't waste time on the hardest multiple choice before picking up some easier points in the grid-ins"
- **Every question on SAT is worth the same.** "Focus on getting the easy and medium questions correct first before taking a crack at harder questions."
- **If you don't know how to do a question, skip it.** "Sometimes, things don't "click," and that's alright. Just keep going and go back to the question later. Most of the time you'll realize that it was actually super easy, and your brain just needed to reset!"

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For the Reading Test:

- **Read the questions quickly before reading the passage.** "I like to circle and underline names and weird words in the questions before reading the passage. I don't try to actively remember them while I read, but my brain seems to pay more attention to those things anyway."
- **Don't over-annotate.** "I used to spend all this time writing notes in the margins that would end up not being helpful for any of the questions. Now I like to circle or underline the most important parts of each paragraph, and maybe jot a + or a - or a check. Sometimes a word or two, maybe a ! or a ? - but that's it."
- **Read actively.** "I always ask myself what the point of each paragraph is after I read it, and I challenge myself to answer that question before I start reading the next paragraph. That way, I keep checking my understanding and I keep myself engaged."

For the Writing & Language Test:

- **Simplify complicated sentences.** "Some sentences are so long and confusing! I find it really helpful to identify the subject and the verb of more complicated sentences and cross out extra stuff like prepositional clauses beginning with of, for, about, with, etc..."

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For the whole test:

- **Don't leave anything blank!** "On the new SAT, there is no penalty for guessing, so if you don't know an answer, go ahead and guess – you might get lucky!"
- **Use the process of elimination.** "Crossing out choices as you go along really helps when you get that feeling that you might need to guess. Every time you confidently eliminate an option, your chance of selecting the correct answer out of the remaining options is higher. Even if you have no idea how to answer a question, try to eliminate any obviously wrong choices – and then guess from the remaining ones."
- **Cover up the choices.** "I always try to come up with an answer on my own before I even look at the choices. This helps me make sure that I don't get distracted by answer choices that look good before I have a chance to figure it out for myself."
- **Pace yourself.** "It can be hard to get through each section in the limited time that you have, much less get the right answers and double check everything! Skip questions that are going to take longer and come back to them if you have time. Don't spend more than 1.5 minutes on any question on your first pass through."
- **Trust yourself.** "When I was taking practice tests, I had no problem getting the sections done in time, but then I'd spend the extra minutes reviewing and second-guessing my first answers. I found I often would switch from the right answer to a wrong one just because I doubted myself!"
- **Bubble in batches.** "I use a system that helps me avoid accidentally bubbling in the wrong answers. I complete five questions (circling my answer choices on the test itself), and then I bubble the answers in on the answer sheet. I think it also saves time. It's inefficient to bubble in answers after every question - think of all that hand movement! But don't wait until the end of the test to bubble in everything, or you might panic – or even run out of time before you have a chance to enter all your answers!"
- **Use any extra time wisely.** "If you find yourself with extra time at the end of a section, make good use of it. No, it isn't fun to re-read all of those questions, but you'll be so glad if you catch any mistakes. The same goes for the answer grid - make sure your answer choices are in the right bubbles!"