

## **THE REDESIGNED SAT: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW**

There's a new test in town! Or shall we call it an old test with a new look. But what does this mean for students? What has changed from the current SAT? How does the revamped SAT compare with or differ from its rival, the ACT? And what about the Core Curriculum?

I, for one, am not panicking! Call me an optimist, but I'm looking at this redesign as an opportunity for our college entrance exams to not only better prepare students for the future, but to also spearhead changes in our classrooms, creating a comprehensive educational platform. In fact, the redesign is already igniting an educational discourse that is causing us to re-evaluate what we are teaching within our schools and how to strengthen our existing curriculum.

So before going into full-on panic mode, let's take a look at what we already know about the new and improved SAT, how it differs from the current SAT and the ACT, examine the changes in each section, and explain how to use this information to create an educated, comprehensive test plan.

### **SO, WHY THE MAKEOVER?**

To put it simply, the SAT had been losing the popularity contest. The number of students taking the test since its last overhaul nine years ago has been dwindling. In 2008, more students still opted for the SAT over the ACT (96,000 more!). But then came a turning point in 2012—this year, for the first time, 1,700 more students took the ACT instead. The following year, this number jumped to 100,000. The ACT was no longer the slow turtle steadily gaining on the hare—the turtle had left the hare in its wake. But now the hare is ready to shake things up in a new race! Since many school districts and states consider the ACT to be better aligned with school curricula, the SAT has followed suit. The new SAT is aligned with the Common Core and is ready for its next big win!

### **GETTING IN LINE WITH THE COMMON CORE**

Coleman helped create the Common Core, an educational initiative whose goal was to provide a consistent and clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help teach them. Put in another way, the core is meant to prepare students not only for college, but to compete in a global workforce. Currently, many students and states consider the ACT to better reflect what is taught in the classroom. Now, every item on the new SAT will align with a Common Core standard. With this change, the hope is that the SAT will no longer be seen as something “outside” the high school experience, but rather a tangible test that reflects

what kids are learning every day at school. By doing this, the College Board is betting that the new SAT will become the “IT” test, outstripping the ACT. And it is already happening: Michigan, for example, has announced that all students in that state will take the new SAT as of March 2016.

**TIMING IT RIGHT**

One of the key factors in deciding whether to take the SAT or ACT is how much time a student needs to complete the test. Traditionally, the SAT has been a better test for students who struggle with time because it allows more time per question. The ACT, in contrast, has been more about beating the clock—especially when it comes to the reading and science sections.

The new SAT is even more favorable to students who need extra time. In essence, the new timing equates to being awarded time and a half on the current ACT. So if a student applies for extra time on the ACT and is denied, then the new SAT might be a better choice.

Section	ACT	Current SAT	Redesigned SAT
English: Grammar/ Writing & Language	36.0	42.9	47.7
Reading	52.5	62.7	75.0
Math	60.0	77.8	84.2
Science	52.5		

**OVERALL CHANGES**

So what is changing? The chart below summarizes the major overall changes to the SAT.

Current SAT		Redesigned SAT		
Sections	3 Reading	67 questions	1 Reading	52 questions
	3 Math – all calculator	54 questions	2 Math – 1 allowing Calculator and 1 with NO Calculator	37 questions 20 questions
	2 Writing (Grammar)	49 questions	1 Writing & Language	44 questions
	1 Essay	25 minutes	1 Essay – “optional”	50 minutes
Timing	3 hrs 45 min		3 hrs 50 min (with optional essay)	
Guessing	Minus ¼ point for wrong answers		No penalty for wrong answers	
Number of Answer Choices	5 choices		4 choices	
Scoring	3 Scores <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading</li> <li>• Writing</li> <li>• Math</li> </ul> 200-800 each - 2,400 total		2 scores <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading/Writing &amp; Language</li> <li>• Math</li> </ul> 200-800 each - 1,600 total Essay is optional and is a separate score	

## MAJOR CONTENT CHANGES

The following chart shows the major content changes that have been made in the redesigned SAT. Keep reading below for a section-by-section description of what to expect.

Redesigned SAT	
Words in Context	Interpret the meaning of words based on the context in which they appear within specific passages
Command of Evidence	Demonstrate ability to interpret, synthesize and use evidence in a wide range of sources including graphs and tables
Optional Essay Analyzing a Source Document	Explain how the author builds a persuasive argument
Math that Matters Most	Focus on linear equations and functions, problem solving and data analysis and analyzing and understanding the structure of expressions
Problems Grounded in Real-World Contexts	Answer questions that directly relate to the work performed in colleges and careers
Inclusion of Science and History/ Social Studies	Apply reading, writing, language and math skills to answer questions in these subject matters
Founding Documents and Great Global Conversation	Analysis of works that explore challenging ideas, offer important insights and reveal new discoveries

## READING

In the current SAT, students are asked to demonstrate their understanding of texts, but are not asked to support their answers. The new redesign is all about the evidence! In this new “Evidence-Based” Reading section, students will need to demonstrate their ability to interpret, synthesize, and use evidence found in a wide range of sources, such as informational graphics, tables, charts, as well as multi-paragraph passages in the areas of literature, the humanities, science, history, and social studies.

Most passages will include at least one question asking them to decide which part of the text best supports the answer to the previous question. Students will also be asked to integrate the information conveyed through words and graphics in order to find the best answer to a question.

*Students will need to:*

- interpret words and phrases in context
- analyze word choices, text structure, point of view, purpose, arguments (Author’s Craft)
- cite textual evidence, determine central ideas and themes, summarizing, understanding relationships, analyzing multiple texts, analyzing quantitative information (Inference)
- determine central themes and analyze structure, purpose and arguments (Organization/Ideas)

## **WRITING AND LANGUAGE**

The Writing Section redesign directly mimics the existing ACT grammar section. Basically, the College Board took the ACT grammar section and made it their own. One big difference: the new SAT writing section also includes charts and graphs. For example, students might need to correct a passage’s inaccurate interpretation of data presented in a table or to improve the clarity of that interpretation. While these charts and graphs might be an odd fit in this section, it seems that the new SAT wants to reproduce the ACT science section without actually adding a science section. By adding some science charts to this section, the test can boast that it does, in fact, cover science. Students will not, however, need to use mathematical computation to answer questions in this section.

*Students will need to focus on:*

- effective language
- conventions of usage
- sentence structure
- punctuation
- relationships of sentences and paragraphs

## **MATH**

The bad news is, the new SAT has tougher math problems. But the good news is students have more time to solve these problems! With the new test, the advanced math found on

the ACT will be added to the SAT test. In this way, the new math section directly aligns with the new Common Core Standards. Another difference is there will be less geometry on this new test.

Most questions in this section will be multiple-choice, but some will require student-produced responses (grid-ins). Some questions will present students with a scenario and then ask several questions about the scenario. Students will also be asked to solve problems grounded in science, social science, career scenarios, and other real-life contexts.

*Students will be tested on:*

- Heart of Algebra – mastery of linear equations and systems
- Problem Solving and Data Analysis
- Passport to Advanced Math – manipulation of complex equations
- Additional Topics in Math – geometric and trigonometric skills

## **ESSAY**

This section will be very different from the essay section on the current SAT. On the new test, rather than measuring a students' ability to construct an argument based on their background and experiences, students will be asked to read a passage and explain how the author builds an argument to persuade an audience. Students may analyze such aspects of the passage as the author's use of evidence, reasoning, and stylistic and persuasive elements.

*Students will need to:*

- read a passage
- explain how the author builds an argument to persuade an audience
- support their explanation with evidence from the passage

## **FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE**

So what are students to do? If you listen to the buzz surrounding the newly redesigned test, you may hear things like, "It's horrible!" "It's a copy-cat of the ACT!" "It's not coachable!" But it's not always good to believe the negative hype. I, for one, will hold off making a final judgment until I see more sample questions and exams. If done right, this could be a wonderful learning experience and academic opportunity for both students and schools.

There are a few positives to keep in mind. First, the core curricula and the new SAT test are now more unified. Curricula can be strengthened by embracing the skills reflected on this new exam and students can prepare within the context of their school. Second, the new test aligns better with the current ACT. So in studying for the new SAT, a student is also in effect preparing for the ACT. Take both exams and submit the test with the higher scores! I see this as a win-win situation.

