

# WHAT IS THE SAT?

## PART 1

### INTRODUCTION

The SAT is a standardized examination designed to measure students' abilities in three areas: reading, writing, and mathematical reasoning. The SAT is written and administered by the College Board. Many American colleges and universities require SAT scores for admission and consider these scores an important factor in judging the quality of applicants.

Why do colleges care about the SAT? Because grading standards vary from one high school to another, it can be hard for colleges to know whether two applicants with the same grades are performing at the same level. Therefore, having everyone take the same standardized test gives schools another metric for judging your abilities against another student's.

Of course, SAT scores aren't the only things that colleges consider when assessing applicants. Your high school grades, course selection, extracurricular activities, recommendation letters, and application essays are all factors that colleges will use to decide whether you are a good fit for their school. However, in today's highly competitive admissions process, a solid SAT score may provide you with the extra edge needed to be successful.

### WHAT'S NEW?

The College Board is implementing significant changes to the SAT that will take effect in the spring of 2016. The new SAT will include a Reading Test, a Writing Test, and a Math Test. Together, the Reading and Writing Test scores will contribute to an Evidence-Based Reading and Writing Area score from 200 to 800 points, and the Math Test score will contribute to a Math Area score from 200 to 800 points. Therefore, your total SAT score on the new exam will be between 400 and 1600. In comparison, the old SAT had a score range from 600 to 2400.

The new SAT will also include an optional Essay Test. The essay will be assigned a separate score that will not factor into your total scaled score for the SAT. Instead, you'll receive an essay score from 1-4 on three specific criteria: Reading, Analysis, and Writing.

The changes to the SAT extend beyond the new format and scoring. The content of the sections will also undergo important revisions. In the Reading and Writing Tests, you'll see a greater emphasis on assessing writing conventions and the author's command of evidence. You'll see passages from a wider range of disciplines, including excerpts from the "Founding Documents" and the "Great Global Conversation." You'll also see vocabulary that is less obscure and used more widely in college.

The Math Test will focus on the core math areas of algebra and data analysis, and will feature more questions drawn from real-life situations. On the optional Essay Test, you'll be given more time (50 minutes), and you'll be asked to demonstrate your ability to analyze data and explain an author's writing style.

The new SAT will also eliminate the guessing penalty. When answering multiple choice questions, you will no longer be deducted a 1/4 point for wrong answers. Also, the new exam offers only 4 answer choices (A to D), compared to 5 answer choices (A to E) for the old exam. You now have a better chance of guessing the right answer (1 in 4 chance) and also won't be penalized for it!

Here's a chart that summarizes some of the important differences between the old SAT and the new SAT:

The Old SAT vs. The New SAT		
Category	Old SAT	New SAT
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 hours 45 minutes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 hours 50 minutes (including the optional 50 minute Essay)</li> </ul>
Sections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical Reading</li> <li>• Writing (includes the Essay)</li> <li>• Math</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence-Based Reading and Writing</li> <li>• Math</li> <li>• Essay (optional and separate from the Writing Test)</li> </ul>
Areas of Emphasis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General reasoning skills</li> <li>• Challenging vocabulary used in limited contexts</li> <li>• Using logic to solve unfamiliar and abstract math problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applying reasoning and knowledge to real-world situations</li> <li>• Using reading, writing, and math skills to analyze evidence</li> <li>• Vocabulary meaning and word choice in a greater range of contexts</li> <li>• Demonstrating core applied reasoning skills in algebra and data analysis</li> </ul>
Question Types	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 161 multiple choice</li> <li>• 10 grid-in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 141 multiple choice</li> <li>• 13 grid-in</li> </ul>
Answer Choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 answer choices (A to E) for m/c questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 answer choices (A to D) for m/c questions</li> </ul>
Penalty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guessing penalty: quarter-point deduction for wrong answers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No penalty for wrong answers</li> </ul>
Scoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total scaled score from 600 to 2400, comprised of area scores from 200-800 in Critical Reading, Mathematics, and Writing</li> <li>• Essay score factored into Writing scaled score</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total scaled score from 400 to 1600, comprised of area scores from 200-800 in Math and in Evidence-Based Reading and Writing</li> <li>• Essay score reported separately</li> <li>• Subscores and cross-test scores demonstrating skills in more specific areas</li> </ul>