



# SAT Program

## Highlights

This handbook has been designed so that you can copy any section and share it with other staff members. You will receive new or revised sections as necessary. To download and print a wealth of additional information, visit [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) and click on the Education Professionals section.

**Score Choice is no longer available.** Students who tested while Score Choice was in effect (November 1993–June 2002) and have scores on hold may keep them on hold until they decide to release them to their permanent record that is sent to colleges and scholarship programs.

### Top Facts about the SAT I: Reasoning Test

**Purpose.** For 75 years, the SAT has been a reliable measure of college readiness. SAT scores are a valuable piece of information to be used in conjunction with high school grades and other factors to help admission staff decide how likely students are to succeed at their college or university.

**Content.** The SAT measures verbal and mathematical reasoning abilities that are important to college success. SAT math sections cover arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and other areas such as probability, newly defined functions, and operations. The test requires students to apply mathematical concepts and use data literacy skills in interpreting tables, charts, and graphs. SAT verbal sections emphasize reading. More than half of the verbal parts of the test are devoted to passage-based reading questions that assess a student's ability to draw inferences, synthesize information, distinguish between main and supporting ideas, and understand vocabulary as it is used in context. Vocabulary is also assessed in sentence completion and analogy questions.

**Validity.** The SAT is a very good predictor of first-year college grades. Social scientists express a positive correlation on a scale of 0 to +1.0, with 0 indicating no correlation and +1.0 indicating a perfect match. Extensive research shows that the average correlation between high school grades and freshman year grades is +0.54, while the correlation between SAT scores and freshman grades is +0.52. The best predictor of all, and the use that the College Board recommends, is a combination of high school grades and test scores, which has a correlation of +0.61, a level that social scientists consider high.

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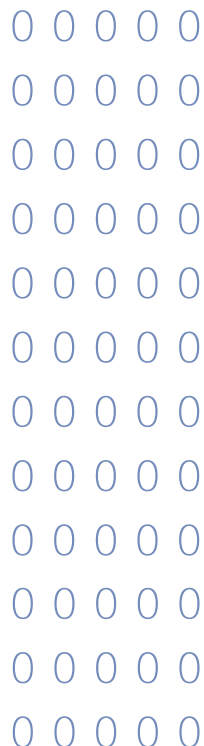
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**Coaching.** Studies that have been carried out in accordance with standard academic procedures indicate that the average effect of coaching on SAT scores is modest. One recent study estimated the effect of coaching on verbal and math scores at 26 points beyond the expected gain of about 30 points. The average gains were greater on the math section (18 points) than on the verbal one (8 points).

**Fairness.** The SAT is one of the fairest and most objective educational assessments. All of the questions on the test are subject to rigorous review for fairness. Average score differences that exist between some racial and ethnic groups reflect real differences in educational opportunity and also show up in other measures of educational performance, e.g., NAEP, GRE, ACT, and high school GPA.

### Using SAT Scores

Test scores have long been useful in helping admissions staff and other educators better understand and interpret students' preparation and qualifications. SAT Program tests provide information about a student's developed verbal and mathematical reasoning abilities (through the SAT I: Reasoning Test) and mastery of specific subject areas (through the SAT II: Subject Tests) — all of which are academic skills generally associated with success in college. Because students from more than 27,000 U.S. secondary schools experience vastly different educational models and grading systems, SAT Program test results provide a consistent and objective measure of students' abilities and achievement in these specific areas.

At the same time, there are also major differences among the 3,600 two- and four-year colleges and universities throughout the United States and in the types of admissions decisions they need to make. In some cases, the primary admissions decision is whether or not a student has met certain basic qualifications. In other situations, there may be many highly qualified applicants but not enough space. Many institutions have some programs that may be essentially "open door," while other programs are highly competitive. At virtually all institutions, "admissions" means much more than simply deciding who will be admitted. Outreach, recruiting, placement, and retention are often integral aspects of admissions work.

Thus, there is not a single approach to admissions and how SAT scores might be used in the process. The following list illustrates some of the ways SAT scores might be used at different colleges and universities:

- Use SAT scores to better understand other information in an applicant's folder, such as grades and courses taken.
- Include SAT scores as one element in an admissions index to determine basic qualifications or preliminary screening.

- Review SAT scores to identify students who might be “at risk” and who might benefit from special advisors, developmental programs, and/or persistence support.
- Recruit students (through the Student Search Service® or from among those who have sent scores) who have SAT scores similar to those of accepted or enrolled students at that institution.
- Conduct research on SAT scores and other criteria to identify characteristics used in decision making that predict success in course placement, completion of freshman year, and/or graduation.
- Include information about SAT scores (such as the middle 50%) of all applicants, accepted students, or enrolled freshmen in promotional materials so that students and counselors can develop an understanding of how the student might fit in that particular institution.

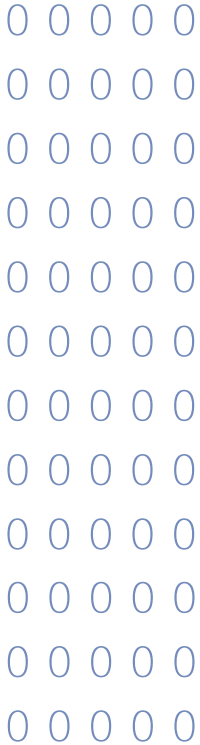
In all cases, the use should be appropriate in the context of the institution’s mission and be based on empirical data and/or a solid rationale. What may be an ideal use of SAT Program data at one institution may be ineffective or inappropriate at another.

A copy of the College Board’s *Guidelines on the Uses of College Board Test Scores and Related Data* is included in this *Handbook*. These guidelines were thoroughly reviewed and updated by College Board members during the 2001-2002 academic year. Included are sections on responsibilities of the College Board and other institutions, agencies, and organizations, as well as guidelines for counseling, recruiting and marketing, admissions (for both institutions and systems), and placement and credit. A special section discusses the use of aggregate scores. Appendices provide lists of uses of test scores and related data that are encouraged and uses that should be avoided.

Below are the nine specific guidelines for admissions use, with commentary and suggestions on where to look for further information. Most of these guidelines apply to all admissions staff as well as to faculty, alumni, consultants, and others who have occasion to use or comment on SAT scores in any way.

#### **I. Know enough about tests and test data to ensure that their proper uses and limitations are understood and applied.**

**Comment:** Understand exactly what the SAT measures by reading *Taking the SAT I*, *Taking the SAT II*, and other printed material. There is considerable information about all of the tests in the SAT Program at [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com).



In addition, users should be familiar with these basic testing and measurement principles:

- mean, median, and mode
- percentiles
- standard error of measurement (SEM)
- standard error of the difference (SED)
- reliability
- raw scores, scaled scores, and equating
- validity
- correlation and correlation coefficient

At [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) there is a section on statistical definitions as well as tables with percentiles and other data about tests in the SAT Program. The College Board offers workshops and sessions at meetings of many different professional organizations to help train new staff and others who use SAT data.

**2. Use SAT scores in conjunction with other indicators, such as the secondary school record (grades and courses), interviews, personal statements, writing samples, portfolios, recommendations, etc., in evaluating the applicant’s admissibility at a particular institution.**

**Comment:** Research shows that the combination of test scores and the student’s high school record (generally GPA or class rank) predict college success better than either test scores or high school information alone. This is only one reason why admissions decisions should be made on a combination of factors rather than a single measure. Each student has many different strengths and unique characteristics; no one measure can capture all of those elements. In addition, SAT scores are neither immutable nor absolute measures of a student’s ability or achievement. As with all tests, there is measurement error in SAT scores and, over time, a student’s skills and achievements change.

No matter how well the SAT predicts a student’s ultimate performance in college, admissions is often related to more than simply identifying the students who will get high grades in college. Colleges may also wish to enroll students who have other important characteristics that might be more evident through the other criteria outlined in this guideline.

Perhaps most importantly, many institutions want to view a student’s SAT scores in relation to their own particular backgrounds. If a student has attended a school with relatively few resources, if the student’s family does not speak English at home, or if the student has had to overcome adversity of some kind, one might expect lower SAT scores than a student who has attended a rigorous secondary school and comes from a highly English literate and supportive family situation.

### 3. View admissions test scores as contemporary and approximate indicators rather than as fixed and exact measures of a student's preparation for college-level work.

**Comment:** SAT scores are a snapshot in time. Both the SAT and the Subject Tests measure developed and acquired skills. Most individuals are constantly learning (and sometimes forgetting) both in and out of school. When students take an SAT more than once, they often do not receive exactly the same score. This is partly because of the measurement error that is characteristic of all assessments.

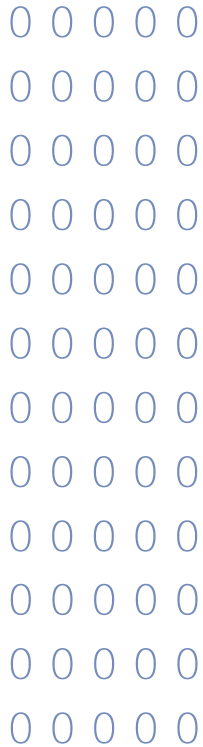
Measurement error does not mean that a test is flawed or contains mistakes, but rather it is something that is inherent in virtually all assessments and is caused by several factors. The primary cause of measurement error is that the questions included on almost all tests represent only a sampling of all possible questions that might be asked about a particular topic. In addition, the timing and conditions of the actual administration may introduce measurement error. Statisticians can calculate for different tests the standard error or measurement (SEM), which gives users a sense of how “precise” scores should be interpreted.

For the SAT, the SEM is about 30 points. In general, about two-thirds of the students who repeat the test will receive scores that are within 30 points (plus or minus) of their original score. For about 95% of students who repeat, the two scores will be within 60 points. For students in two recent graduating classes who took the SAT in both their junior and senior years, the average change was a 14-point increase on verbal and a 14-point increase on math. About 55% of these students saw their senior-year scores increase, while 35% experienced decreases and 10% had no change.

Another reason that scores change is that students' skills and abilities might have changed. Research has shown that the verbal and mathematical reasoning abilities measured by the SAT increase slowly over a student's school career (and beyond). However, the Subject Tests are much more directly related to course work. For example, the average score on the French Subject Test for students who had studied French for two years was 492. For three years of study, the average increased to 541, and for four years, the average was 580. If the student is taking a Subject Test months or even years after having taken a course in the subject, it is likely that the score will be lower than it might have been if the student had taken the test immediately following the end of the course.

Several tables at [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) provide actual score-change information for all students who took the SAT in recent graduating classes. (See the section on “Repeating the Test.”)





**4. Evaluate test results and other information about applicants in the context of their particular background and experience, as well as in the context of the programs they intend to pursue.**

**Comment:** Percentiles are the easiest way to interpret scores in context. In addition to national and state percentiles, [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) includes tables with percentiles for males and females, for each racial/ethnic group, and for younger students (7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders) and adults. Since most institutions serve a unique clientele, it is important to develop a sense of how a particular student's scores might fit in a local context — perhaps in relation to the secondary school the student attends, the entire applicant pool, or students applying to a particular major.

For example, a student with a combined total score of 1050 (450 verbal plus 600 math) scored higher than 55% of all students who recently took the SAT when only the total score is considered. You learn more about this student, however, when you look at the verbal and math scores separately. The 450 verbal score is above that of 29% of all students nationally, and the 600 math score is above that of 76%. If this student is from Texas, the verbal score is above that of 33% and the math score is above that of 81% in the state. If this student is Mexican American, the verbal score is above that of 49% and the math score is above that of 91% of all Mexican Americans. If this student is a female, her verbal score is above that of 30% and her math is above that of 81% of all female SAT takers.

**5. Ensure that small differences in test scores are not the basis for rejecting an otherwise qualified applicant.**

**Comment:** As noted in number 3, SAT scores are not absolutely precise. For an individual student, view the scores within the range of the SEM. When comparing two students, use the standard error of the difference, which is 40 points for the SAT. (The reason the SED is larger than the SEM is that it takes into account the variation in both scores being compared.) For two scores to reflect real differences in ability, the two scores must be different by at least 1.5 times the SED (60 points). So if one student has a 450 verbal and another a 500 verbal, these two students likely have the same ability. Rejecting a student on the basis of such a small difference in test scores would be inappropriate and unfair.

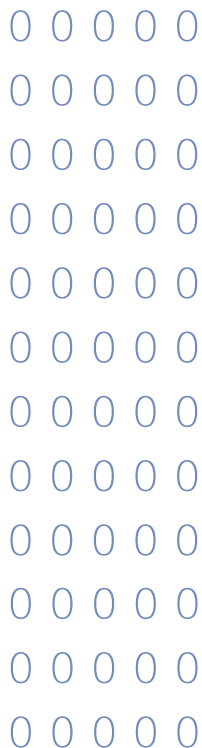
**6. Guard against using minimum test scores unless used in conjunction with other information such as secondary school performance and unless properly validated. An exception to this guideline is that institutions may establish, based on empirical data, specific score levels that reflect desired skill competencies, such as English language proficiency.**

**Comment:** This guideline attempts to balance science and reality. Any minimum test score should be questioned because a student's true score might be 30 or in a few cases 60 points below the reported score. (True score is a theoretical concept of what the student's real ability is. The reported score is what was actually measured, and the SEM describes the range within which the true score probably falls.) This guideline also reflects the College Board's general position that, for most admissions purposes, SAT scores should be used in conjunction with information from the student's secondary school record.

However, in reality, because institutions want to communicate clearly what their expectations are (and in some cases because governing bodies wish to have a clear, objective set of admissions criteria that can be easily explained), institutions may publish information about what combination of scores and grades is generally required for admission. Usually, this information is presented as an index where there is an inverse relationship between SAT scores and grades (or class rank) — that is, students with high grades need a lower score than students with lower grades. For example, students with grades above 3.5 or in the top 10% might be eligible or admitted with any score; students with grades of 3.0 or the top 20% might be admitted if they have a combined SAT verbal and math score of at least 1100; students with grades of 2.5 or in the top half of the class might need SAT scores of at least 1250; and so forth.

This type of index is best if it is based on research at each individual institution; however, there is considerable published research that supports this approach. Although the numbers vary by institution, average correlations of SAT scores with freshman grades in college are .52. The average correlation of grades with freshman college grades is .54. When SAT scores and high school grades are combined, the correlation increases to .61. Some institutions have even conducted research that shows that students who have certain high school records or who have scored below a certain point have relatively little chance of succeeding at that institution or in particular programs.





This guideline also acknowledges that many institutions have established minimum expectations for English language proficiency (generally a requirement for international applicants) and that this practice is acceptable if the minimums are based on appropriate empirical data. Admissions officers should still take the SEM into account in these situations and consider additional factors if the applicant's score is very close to the minimum and if other information suggests that the student's true score might be higher than the reported score.

### 7. Regularly validate data used in the selection process to ensure their continuing relevance.

**Comment:** Every college and university should examine each type of information used in the admissions process to determine whether or not it reflects the abilities and attributes valued by the institution. A great deal of information about the content of both the SAT and the Subject Tests is available for public review. Test Development committees are drawn from the ranks of active admissions officers, faculty, and other educators to assure that the tests remain current, but each institution should also periodically review the tests to assure that the content is valid.

Validity also refers to how well the SAT fulfills its purpose — in most cases, predicting grades or completion of one or more years of study. The College Board offers a free Admitted Class Evaluation Service (ACES) to assist institutions in validating SAT scores and other information used in making admission and placement decisions. Further information about this Internet-based service is provided at [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) and in the new *ACES Validity Handbook*.

The frequency of validating admissions criteria depends on each institution's unique situation. If there has been relatively little change in the applicant pool and in the academic expectations of enrolled students, formal validity studies can be conducted infrequently. If, however, there are changes in the characteristics of applicants or if there have been changes at the institution (for example, new freshman-year course requirements), validity studies should be conducted to verify the effectiveness of admissions factors. Validity studies might also be conducted if the faculty has noticed a change in the student body or if the institution is contemplating changes in admissions requirements.

## 8. Maintain adequate procedures for protecting the confidentiality of test scores and other admissions data.

**Comment:** Admissions offices should periodically audit their operations from a security perspective, tracing the path of SAT scores and other application materials from the time and place of receipt to their final destination (registrar's office, temporary or permanent records retention, or destruction). Do only those individuals who need to know this information have access? Are there safeguards to be sure that unauthorized individuals are not able to gain access to confidential records? Have all authorized individuals been trained about how to treat confidential information?

## 9. When introducing or revising admissions policies, allow sufficient lead time and provide adequate notice to schools and students so that they can take the new policies into account when planning school programs and curricular offerings and preparing for admissions tests and other requirements.

**Comment:** Because students and schools want to do whatever possible to meet an institution's expectations, they need sufficient lead time to make plans for curricular changes or other modifications to reflect any modifications in an institution's requirements. Many changes in a school's program cannot be made quickly, and often curricular modifications need to be introduced in middle school or the first year of high school.

## Admissions Survey Reminder

The Annual Survey of Colleges is sent to an official at 3,600 colleges each October with a return date of late December. The survey is sent to the person the college has designated as the appropriate survey respondent, most often someone in Institutional Research or Admissions. We urge you to update the survey in full and return it on time. The information collected on the ASC is used in the *College Handbook* and related annual directories that are bought by thousands of schools and students each year. The information is also used in the college search feature of the College Board's Web site and on the College Profile section of the Student Score Report. The survey is your opportunity to provide the most recent data about your college for use by prospective applicants. For additional information, please contact Michael Tuller, 212 713-8117, [mtuller@collegeboard.org](mailto:mtuller@collegeboard.org).

## 2002–2003 SAT Program Test Calendar

Test Dates <sup>1</sup>	Oct. 12	Nov. 2	Dec. 7	Jan. 25	April 5 <sup>2</sup>	May 3	June 7
Test Date Formula	2nd Sat. in Oct.	1st Sat. in Nov.	1st Sat. in Dec.	4th Sat. in Jan.	Sat. 2 weeks before Easter	1st Sat. in May	1st Sat. in June
<b>Registration Deadlines</b>							
Early (International) <sup>3</sup>	N/A	Sept. 4	Oct. 9	Nov. 27	N/A	March 5	April 9
Regular	Sept. 10	Sept. 27	Nov. 1	Dec. 23	Feb. 28	March 28	May 2
Late (United States)	Sept. 14	Oct. 9	Nov. 13	Jan. 2	Mar. 12	April 9	May 14
<b>SAT I: Reasoning Test<sup>4</sup></b>							
	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
<b>SAT II: Subject Tests</b>							
Writing	•	•	•	•		•	•
Literature	•	•	•	•		•	•
United States History	•	•	•	•		•	•
World History			•				•
Math Level IC	•	•	•	•		•	•
Math Level IIC	•	•	•	•		•	•
Biology E/M	•	•	•	•		•	•
Chemistry	•	•	•	•		•	•
Physics	•	•	•	•		•	•
<b>Languages</b>							
<b>Reading Only</b>							
French	•		•	•		•	•
German							•
Modern Hebrew							•
Italian			•				
Latin			•				•
Spanish	•		•	•		•	•
<b>Reading and Listening<sup>5</sup></b>							
Chinese		•					
French		•					
German		•					
Japanese		•					
Korean		•					
Spanish		•					
ELPT		•		•			

- Sunday administrations follow each Saturday test date.
- In April, only SAT I is available and only in the U.S., U.S. territories, and Puerto Rico.
- Applies to Sunday and testing closer to home for international students. Requests for test centers closer to home cannot be honored for October 2002 and June 2003.
- The SAT I Question-and-Answer Service is available for: Saturday, October 12, 2002; Saturday, January 25, 2003; Saturday, May 3, 2003; and Sunday, May 4, 2003.
- Language Tests with Listening, including the ELPT™ (English Language Proficiency Test™), are available at many U.S. and international test centers in November. ELPT is also offered in January and in participating schools on April 22, 2003.