

# Strategies for taking the SAT and ACT

# IUPUI



## The new SAT

The new SAT measures critical reading, mathematics reasoning, and writing.

Every student taking the new SAT should obtain a copy of the free booklet "SAT

Preparation Booklet." Copies are available at all the high schools and on line at

<http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/about/SAT1.html>.

This booklet has a complete sample test with an answer sheet and scoring grid.

We suggest you take the following steps several weeks before taking the actual test:

1. Block out a four-hour time slot; it is best to mimic a testing situation by doing this on a Saturday morning.
2. Take the practice test.
3. Score the practice test for the critical reading and math portions. (This is a key step that many students skip.)

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**Note the following points about the SAT (critical reading and math sections)**

1. The test is designed so that very few people will earn a perfect score. Less than 5% will ever earn a perfect score on one section and even fewer will earn perfect scores on more than one section. More than one million students take this test each year.
2. The test is designed so that about 80% of the typical college-bound student population *will not be able* to answer 25% or more of the questions correctly.
3. Wrong answers are counted against your score.
4. Answers left blank are ignored.
5. You are penalized for guessing when you guess wrong. **DO NOT GUESS.**
6. Do not panic or worry if you cannot answer many of the questions. You are a typical college-bound student if you can only answer 60 to 70%. (When you learn how to score your results for the practice test, you will see what percentage of students answered a question correctly.)
7. If you skip a question, make sure that you keep in synch with the answer sheet question numbers. It is a good tactic to repeat to yourself the question number and answer as you pencil in the response on the answer sheet. e.g. "I am answering 14 and the answer is C."

**As you take the practice test, do the following:**

1. Have three pencils, each with a different lead color (black, green, and red lead).
2. Read the directions, set a timer for the allotted time for that section.
3. Start the first section and answer only the questions for which you immediately know the answer. Spend less than 20 seconds thinking about an answer. **USE A BLACK LEAD PENCIL FOR THESE ANSWERS.** If you do not know the answer immediately, skip the question.
4. You will finish the first section with more than half the questions unanswered; however, you looked at every question and answered those for which you know the answer. You should still have at least half the time for the section remaining.
5. Return to the first question you skipped. Try to reason out the answer by eliminating several answers but do not guess. Follow a hunch if you are trying to decide between one of two responses. **USE A GREEN LEAD PENCIL FOR THESE ANSWERS.** If you have no clue as to the answer, guess and **USE A RED LEAD PENCIL.**

6. You should be able to fill in an answer for every question in the section. Some answers in black (perhaps 40%), some in green (maybe 20 to 30%), and the rest in red lead.
7. Repeat these steps for each of the test sections, following the same strategy.
8. At the end of the booklet, you will find the answer key and the method to score the results. Note you are subtracting (using a formula) wrong answers from right answers. Score your results. First score only the answers where you used the black lead pencil. Then score the answers using the questions where you used both the black lead and the green lead pencils. Finally, score the test using all the questions with all three lead pencils.
9. Your score using the black lead pencil may be your highest score, or it might improve slightly when you use the combination of black lead and green lead. How much did it improve? Was it worth taking an educated or calculated guess? When you calculate the combined score of the red, green, and black lead responses, your score likely dropped hundreds of points. Note on the answer key what percentage of students answered the question correctly. Many questions have only 20% of three million testers answering the question correctly.
10. To receive a 500 on each section, you only need to answer about half the questions. (Just be sure they are the right answers!)
11. For the writing section, first complete a quick outline of key points you wish to make. You may wish to make 3 or 4 points. Very briefly state those points in the opening paragraph. Each paragraph that follows should be written to defend or explain one key point. Your summary paragraph should tie the key points together.

**The ACT**

This test measures your classroom knowledge in English, mathematics, science, and social sciences. It is not a reasoning test but rather a knowledge or achievement test. Wrong answers do not count against your score. The test is multiple choice. If possible, eliminate responses to some questions with educated guesses but not random guesses. If you are lucky with a random guess, you will be receiving a score that does not indicate your true knowledge level. More information about the ACT, sample questions, and test taking tips are available at <http://www.actstudent.org/>.

*These strategies are the suggestion of Mike Donahue, Director of Admissions at IUPUI.*