# **SAT Sections**

The [SAT](http://www.princetonreview.com/college/sat-information) includes two sections comprised of three tests: Reading, Math, Writing & Language, plus an optional Essay. Some schools may require the Essay, so be sure to ask before you take the SAT.

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| **What's on the SAT:** |
| Reading | * 52 multiple–choice questions
* 65 minutes
* Passages or pairs of passages (literature, historical documents, social sciences, and natural sciences)
* Learn more about the [SAT Reading Test](http://www.princetonreview.com/college-advice/sat-reading-tips)
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| Math | * 58 multiple–choice questions and 1 set of “extended-thinking” grid-in questions )
* 80 minutes
* Algebra I and II, geometry, and some trigonometry
* Learn more about the [SAT Math test](http://www.princetonreview.com/college-advice/sat-math-practice)
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| Writing & Language | * 44 multiple–choice questions
* 35 minutes
* Grammar, vocabulary in context, and editing skills
* Learn more about the [SAT Writing test](http://www.princetonreview.com/college-advice/sat-writing-section)
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| Essay (Optional\*) | * 1 essay
* 50 minutes
* Read a passage and explain how the author builds a persuasive argument \*We recommend taking the [SAT essay](http://www.princetonreview.com/college-advice/sat-essay) because some schools require it.
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SAT Reading Tips for a Great Score

* 1. Know what to expect.

You’ll have 65 minutes to read five passages (taken from literature, history, social studies, and the natural sciences) and answer a total of 52 questions. The questions will ask you to do everything from determining the meaning of words in context, deciding why an author included a certain detail, finding the main idea of a whole passage, comparing two passages, or even pinpointing information on a graph.

* 2. Choose your own order.

Reading questions are not presented in order of difficulty, but they are in chronological order. Don’t be afraid to skip a hard question, and don’t worry if you can’t answer every question. Learn more about [SAT tips](http://www.princetonreview.com/college-advice/3-sat-tips) for working questions out of order.

* 3. Read what you need.

You don’t have to waste time reading every single word of the passage and trying to become an expert on whatever the topic is. You have the passage right there in front of you. So, move back and forth between the passage and the questions, focusing only on what you need instead of getting mired down in all the little details.

* 4. Leave your opinions at the door.

Often, in an English class, you are asked to give your own opinion, supported by the text. Not so on the SAT. Be careful when you see a question that contains the word *infer*, *imply*, or *suggest*. The answer may not be directly stated in the text, but there will still be plenty of evidence there to support the correct answer.

* 5. Take dual passages one at a time.

One of your science or history/social studies passages will be a set of dual passages—two shorter texts about one topic.  Do questions about the first passage first, questions about the second passage second, and questions about both passages last. This will save time and keep you from confusing the two passages when you’re evaluating the answer choices.

* 6. Save main idea questions for last.

For many of the Reading passages, the very first question will ask a general question about the main idea or purpose of the passage, the narrative point of view, or a shift that occurs through the passage. Those general questions are not good to do first because you haven’t read the entire passage yet. Once you’ve done most of the other questions, you'll have a really good idea of the overall themes of the text.

SAT Math: What to Study

Here's a list of math concepts that are tested on the SAT:

1. Algebra I and II
2. Arithmetic/Probability/Data Analysis
3. Plane Geometry/Coordinate Geometry/Trigonometry

That’s it! Of these categories, [Algebra](http://www.princetonreview.com/academic-tutoring/subjects/algebra) makes up the largest part of the test, accounting for more than half of the questions. [Plane Geometry](http://www.princetonreview.com/academic-tutoring/subjects/geometry) and [Trigonometry](http://www.princetonreview.com/academic-tutoring/subjects/trigonometry) make up the smallest part—there will only be a maximum of 6 questions from that category on the SAT.

How the Test is Organized

The SAT Math test is made up of two sections—sections 3 and 4 of the overall test. Here's what you can expect on each of them.

| **Section 3** | **Section 4** |
| --- | --- |
| No calculator | Calculator |
| 25 minutes | 55 minutes |
| 20 questions:* 15 multiple-choice questions
* 5 Grid-in questions
 | 38 questions:* 30 multiple-choice questions
* 8 Grid-in questions
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About Grid-ins

13 of the 58 Math questions will require you to produce your own answers and mark them on a grid printed on your answer sheet.

Although the format of these questions is different from that of the multiple choice questions, the mathematical concepts tested aren’t all that different.

Which SAT math formulas do I need to memorize?

Both SAT Math sections will begin with the same set of instructions. These instructions include a few formulas, like the area and circumference of a circle, that you may need to know in order to answer some of the questions. You should learn these formulas ahead of time so you don’t have to waste valuable time flipping back to them during the test.

What kind of calculator should I bring?

If you have a graphing calculator, great. If you don’t, don’t sweat it! Graphing calculators are not necessary on the SAT. If you do decide to use a graphing calculator, keep in mind that it cannot have a QWERTY-style keyboard on it (like the TI-95). Also, you can't use the calculator on your phone. On test day, you will have to turn your phone off and put it underneath your seat.

## SAT Writing: Here's How to Tackle It

Essentially, the SAT Writing Test is asking you to be an editor—to fix mistakes in sentences and passages and revise them to make them better.  But how are you supposed to pick an answer when there’s no explicit question? Follow these three strategies.

Let Process of Elimination do the big work for you.

### **Check what’s changing in the answer choices.**

The word “document” remains the same in each, but what comes after it changes each time. This question, then, seems to be asking, Which words will best link the two ideas in the sentence?

### **Learn from the answer choices.**

The way we speak is often very different from the way we write. Use the answer choices to reveal mistakes that you might not otherwise have spotted (or heard) in the sentence.

### **Process of Elimination Does the Heavy Lifting**

Once you have a sense of what the question is testing, Process of Elimination can get you closer and closer to the answer. Cross off just one or two wrong answers, and the correct answer becomes more obvious.

Answer: (C)

Choices (A) and (D) make the sentence incomplete, so those should be eliminated. Choice (B) creates a run-on sentence, so that should also be eliminated. Only (C) appropriately links the ideas without adding new errors.

## How to Wow Colleges with your SAT Essay Score

### **Stay Objective**

The thing to remember here is that [ETS](http://www.ets.org/) (the company that writes the test) is *not*asking you for your opinion on a topic or a text. So be sure to maintain formal style and an objective tone. Tip: Avoid “I” and “you.

### **Keep It Tidy**

Handwriting is becoming a lost art. Unfortunately, this is one occasion where your skill with a pencil matters. Graders read tons of essays each day. If they cannot decipher your script, they will lower your score. Do yourself a favor and write legibly.

### **(Indented) Paragraphs Are Your Friend**

Remember the basic essay structure you learned in school: introductory paragraph, body paragraphs and a conclusion? The graders love it! Your introduction should describe the text and paraphrase the argument being made, as well as introduce the specific elements of the passage and argument that you will discuss in the essay. Your conclusion should restate the goal of the passage/argument and sum up the points you made.

### **For Example…**

Use your body paragraphs to back up your thesis statement *by citing specific examples.*Use short, relevant quotes from the text to support your points.

### **Don't Worry About the Exact Terms for Things**

When describing how the author builds his or her argument, “appeal to the emotions” is fine instead of specifically referencing “pathos.” And “comparison of two things” can be used instead of referring to a metaphor. If you do know the official terms, though, feel free to use them!