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# *SETTING YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS*

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**A Guide to Help You Make the Best Decisions about the SAT, ACT, & College Admissions Process**

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***PRECISION TEST PREP***

PrecisionTestPrep.com

# ***Introduction***

**Picture this:** You are about to make one of the most important *and* expensive decisions of your life. You have three options for dealing with this. Each door represents an option. Which door do you choose?



1. Do little if any research and “go with your gut.”
2. Ask your friends and rely on what others say or what other people have done without really understanding why or what you are doing.
3. Research and find information from experts in the field that can help you make the best decision.

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# ***Introduction***

Unfortunately, when it comes to test prep and the college admissions process as a whole, the vast majority of people choose options 1 and 2. However, I'm here to tell you that option 3 is within everyone's reach. Most, if not all, of what you really need to know to establish a basic understanding of the SAT, ACT, and college process is contained within this short eBook. Is everything you need to know included in this book? Well, it depends on your situation. One thing is for sure: The information in this eBook will help to set a foundation for you to make better decisions when it comes to the college prep process.

When I meet with families to tutor the SAT and ACT, more times than not I'm told which test a student will be taking. However, I almost always find that parents are or will be making a major decision that will impact themselves and their children both financially and educationally without a real understanding of all the details and options. In other words, hearsay isn't the best way to go about this life changing process.

While many do have their hearts set on taking one test over another or both the SAT and ACT, the vast majority don't really know what to do or are making this important decision because they heard from a friend that one test is easier than another.

I can assure you that neither test is easy. One could be better suited for a particular student, therefore making it appear "easier," but neither is easy. They can become "easy" with solid tutoring and great preparation, but the idea of easy or easier is something you want to get out of your head. These tests are challenging. Period.

In the end, this eBook can help to clarify many questions or concerns that you as a parent or test taker may have so you can make the best and most informed decision when it comes to these tests. Doing so will increase your chances of getting what you want: good scores that will help get the test taker into the best college.

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# Creating Your Silver Platter

One of the major concepts that I work on with parents and students involves taking a bigger picture view of the college acceptance process. In order to have the best chance at getting into the best schools, you need to visualize presenting the candidate on a silver platter. Remember: Taking the SAT and ACT are only one part of a much bigger goal. . . to get into the best schools possible.

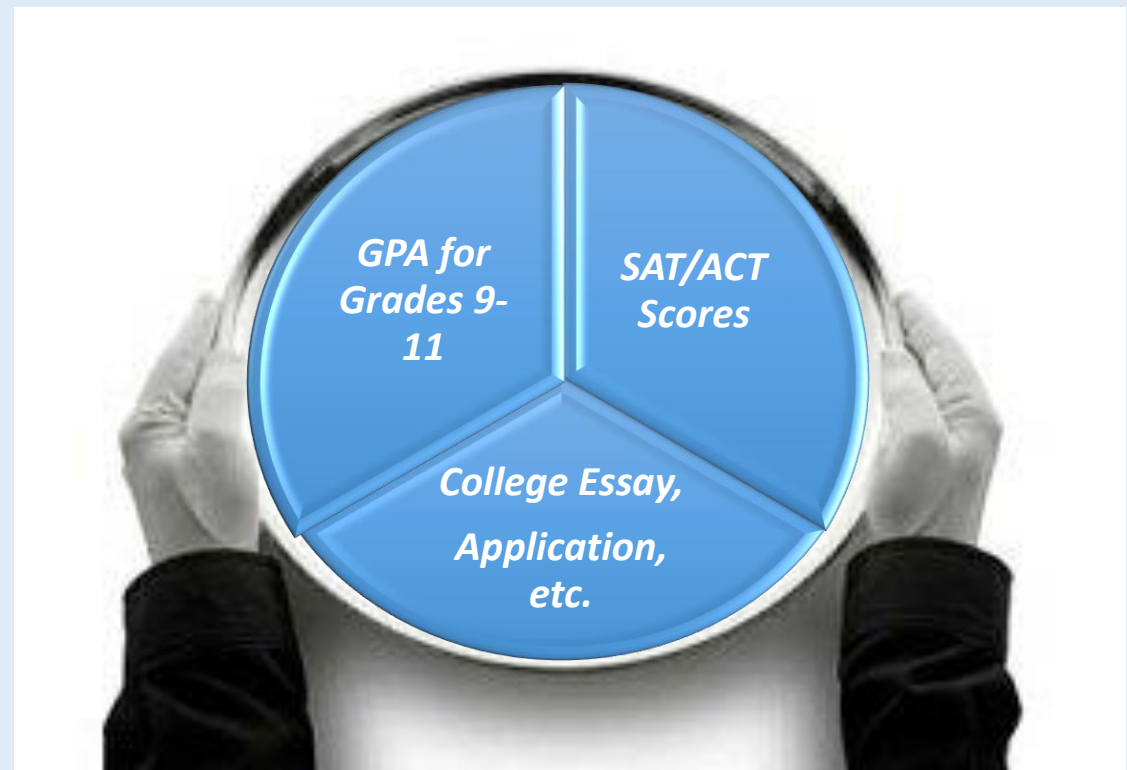
## What will be on this silver platter?

When applying to college, applicants are judged on several factors, including, but not limited to: grades, SAT and/or ACT scores, talent, recommendations, lineage, the college essay, and the application itself.

Each factor carries its own weight, and a great college essay and application, talent, and recommendations, can all influence the possibility of acceptance. Yet, the two most influential factors for 99% of students are. . .

You guessed it: **grades and tests scores**. And it's by a very wide margin.

**The other aspects of the silver platter must be used to humanize the candidate and show that he or she is not just another number.**



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# ***Creating Your Silver Platter***

## **Welcome to High-Stakes Testing**

The SAT and ACT are only taken a few times at most, yet account for a tremendous percentage of the college portfolio. In other words, all the work that a student has put into and is still putting into his or her classes weighs about the same as *one* test score.

When applying to colleges, students can't realistically consider schools that are too far outside the range of their ACT or SAT score. They can apply, but the odds are against them. Even if their high school grades are stellar, there is a much lower percentage chance that the student will gain acceptance if the SAT and ACT scores aren't in line with the high grades. Could they get in with an amazing application, letters of recommendation, and other important factors? Yes, it is definitely possible, but the odds are against them.

The flip side of this scenario is when a student's high school grades aren't stellar, but his or her SAT and/or ACT scores are. The game changes for this student as he or she has just become a much more marketable commodity. In many cases, extra weight is put on the SAT and ACT.

And for these reasons the SAT and ACT are called high-stakes tests. Literally getting one or two questions wrong can do a lot damage. It is hard to believe, but ten points

on the SAT or 1 point on the ACT could make or break a student's chances of acceptance. Fair? No. Reality? Yes. And that's why it is so important to create a great silver platter and why you need to strive to create a silver platter that overwhelmingly puts the student over the top and into the "yes" category.

Having worked with families to help them construct silver platters for years by tutoring students, coaching them on how to write their college essays, and helping them to develop the college applications that stand out, there is absolutely nothing that surprises me. Like it or not, these tests are that important.

## **How Can an Amazing College Essay and Application Help a Student Gain Acceptance?**

Most people think the college essay is an essay that resembles a standard essay written in English class. This common mistake leads to a lot of problems, among them rejection from colleges.

The college essay is very difficult for students to write. Parents spend years teaching their kids to be modest. Now, they have to discuss their thoughts, dreams, failures, and ambitions in a creative form. To make matters worse, students are not accustomed to writing creatively. For many, this is very intimidating and extremely stressful.

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# ***Creating Your Silver Platter***

The college essay must be a well-written piece that grabs the admissions officer's attention. If not, it could make or break a student's application. The expression "You only get one chance to make a first impression" sums up the college essay perfectly. Applicants need to brainstorm for ideas and creatively express them. Afterwards, they must edit the piece perfectly. The entire writing process is on display here, and as someone who has coached students through the writing of these essays, I think that part of it is designed to see if students understand what the writing process is because they need to understand it in order to have success with writing at the college level.

The application itself contains several questions. The questions tend to vary from application to application: some applications have several short responses, some have several short and long responses, and some have none at all.

A good application helps to humanize the student and remove the cloak, so to speak. Students begin to appear as more than just their grade point average and SAT or ACT scores. They can finally be "more than just a number."

As a whole, the application process can be daunting depending on how many schools a student applies to. The Internet has made it a lot easier for students to apply to college, and I think this has led colleges to add more questions to their applications. For some colleges, a lot of writing is required and several of the questions require research. One popular question is the "Why Us?" question. This question is challenging because it requires applicants to find concrete reasons as to why they want to attend the school. Personally, I like this question because it forces students to vet the school. Students must find reasons beyond the name, reputation, locations, and basketball or football teams to show why they want to attend the school. Believe it or not, but this question can prevent a lot of future heartache.

In the end, use the silver platter as your go-to visual for the process. Keep working to polish the platter until everything on it shines.

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# ***What is the SAT?***

SAT stands for Scholastic Aptitude Test. This test has been administered since 1926 and has gone through several variations. Recently, the College Board (the makers of the SAT), changed the test, though my experience with the many iterations of SAT tells me that it is fair, and if anything, has numerous positives over the last version.

## **The current SAT is designed as follows:**

Students start off with a 65 minute, 52 question **Reading section**. There are 5 passages in total, with one group of questions pertaining to a "paired passage." Additionally, there are some graphs and/or charts that pertain to some of the passages. Vocabulary-in-context has replaced the archaic vocabulary that the SAT was famous for.

The test then shifts to the **Writing and Language section**. This section is 35 minutes and 44 questions. Proficiency in grammar, a good understanding of structure, and good reading skills are essential to success here. If the test taker has little experience with grammar, it is absolutely critical that this is addressed immediately. A good tutor can show a student creative ways to learn the rules of grammar, especially which rules are tested more than others, and when to expect to see these on the test. In my experience, I have seen tremendous jumps in scores on the grammar section of

tests like the SAT and ACT because most students have a very weak foundation in grammar.

The **Math section** is up next. The Math section is really two separate sections that go together. The first part of the Math section is 25 minutes long. Students answer 15 multiple choice questions and 5 "grid-ins," in which they write in and bubble their answers. However, students can't use calculators on this part. Then, students take the next Math section. This part is 55 minutes long, consisting of 30 multiple choice questions and 8 grid-ins. Included in these 8 grid-ins is an "Extended Thinking" question. An "Extended Thinking" question is longer, word problem type question. Students can use a calculator on this section. I can't stress enough how important it is for the test taker to not only feel comfortable with the calculator, but how to use it to his or her advantage. The ability to use a calculator properly is a skill that tutors must cover because time can be an issue on this section. Knowing how to maneuver through a problem with a calculator is an important skill for a test taker to have.

Next up is the **Essay section**. The Essay section concludes the SAT. This section is optional, but unless you know which schools you are applying to (and if these schools require or do not require the essay), you have to take it. The last thing you want is to find out that a college

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you are applying to requires the essay and that you didn't take it.

As an English teacher, I like the new version of the essay. The task is tied much closer to what students do in school than it has been in the past. Students are given an article, speech, document, etc. and have to show how the author persuades the reader towards his or her point. Students have 50 minutes for the task, and when they embrace the writing process, can really excel.

Yet, students who struggle with writing analytical essays or haven't encountered this style essay need to meet with

someone who can help them. Since the essay may count, students need to approach this as not only counting for, but possibly against them, especially if the essay score is poor. The good news? ***This essay is very teachable.***

Scores on the SAT are out of 1600. The Reading and Writing & Language sections are counted together out of 800 and the Math section is counted on its own out of 800 as well. The Essay section is scored and counted separately.

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## ***What is superscoring?***

*Super Scoring involves colleges taking your two best scores from different tests and combining them. This becomes your score.*

## ***Can I superscore my SAT scores?***

*The majority of schools Super Score your SAT scores.*

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# ***What is the ACT?***

The American College Test--more commonly known as the ACT--is another test that colleges consider for acceptance. The ACT has been offered since 1959, but has only recently gained traction among students on the East Coast. The issue I have found with the ACT is that parents and students mistakenly believe that the ACT is easier than the SAT and only take the ACT. This is a mistake in my opinion. The ACT *could* be easier for some students just as the SAT *could* be easier for others. Yet, simply choosing the ACT over the SAT is in my opinion a mistake.

The ACT has four main sections and one optional essay. Depending on breaks given by the proctor, students can expect this test to last for up to four hours.

The test starts off with a 75 question grammar test known as the **English section**. Students are allotted 45 minutes for this section. Students are tasked with editing five essays in the allotted time. Like the SAT, which copied the ACT almost exactly to create the SAT Writing and Language section, students need to be proficient in grammar, reading, and time management to be successful. The problem with the ACT English section is that most students have not been taught enough grammar in school to consider themselves proficient. As a result, students may find this section very challenging and likely need a good tutor to not review, but actually teach, the necessary skills. The good thing is that like the

SAT Writing and Language section, I have found that students typically make exceptional progress on this section once they have learned the basics *and* understand the questions.

The English section is followed by the **Math section**, which is made up of 60 questions to be answered in 60 minutes. This section is roughly broken into three parts that I like to call easy, medium, and hard. However, the "easy" section is by no means easy. This chunk of questions covers more basic math such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. The second twenty or so questions are more difficult and begin to cover tougher concepts. The last twenty or so questions take much more time and require a stronger understanding of mathematics. Students are sure to find geometry and trigonometry towards the end of the section. Students can use a calculator to assist them. Similar to the SAT Math section, knowing how to use a calculator to your advantage is an integral part of this section.

Next, students turn to the **Reading section**, which is 35 minutes long and consists of four, 10 question passages. Unlike the SAT, the vocabulary is not as sophisticated, but the limited amount of time makes this section very difficult to complete. Additionally, the questions are randomized, so, unlike the SAT, students have a hard time figuring out where to look for the answers unless

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# ***What is the ACT?***

they *know where to look*.

The next section is the **Science section**. In essence, this is an extension of the Reading section and requires no real science background. Although called Science, this section ***is really a reading test***. Picture a lab you worked on in biology, earth science, chemistry, or physics class. Students are given a page or so of an experiment or lab write-up, complete with background information, graphs, and charts. Students have to quickly maneuver five to seven of these lab write-ups and answer 40 questions in only 35 minutes. Students are almost always fatigued at this point, and this makes the section that much harder.

The test concludes with the optional **Writing Test**. Students are given a prompt about a topic that is fairly

universal. As part of the task, students have to evaluate multiple perspectives within a 40-minute time frame, figure out positives and negatives for each perspective, and either side with one of the perspectives or develop their own. To say the least, it's complicated! Ability to analyze, think critically, and plan are highly valued on this section.

Each section is scored out of 36. How the test makers arrived at this number, I have no idea, though it is easy to score when you know the formula. What I do know is that each question answered incorrectly damages a student's score very quickly. I consider the ACT a reading test with a math section and an optional essay, and the ability to read and process information quickly is extremely important.



## ***Can I superscore my ACT scores?***

*More and more colleges are beginning to Super Score the ACT, so there is no one answer. It depends on where you are applying.*

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# ***Test Prep as Driver's Ed***

The College Board has long fought the notion that people can increase their scores by working with a tutor. This is totally untrue.

Here is a snippet taken from the College Board website:

*"If you think the key to a high score is memorizing words and facts you'll never use in the real world, think again. You don't have to discover secret tricks or cram the night before.*

*The same habits and choices that lead to success in school will help you get ready for the SAT. The best way to prepare for the test is to:*

- \* Take challenging courses.*
- \* Do your homework.*
- \* Prepare for tests and quizzes.*
- \* Ask and answer lots of questions"*

Now, if it were this simple then all students would get amazingly high scores because they have at least partially fulfilled these requirements! Of course this is not the case. The College Board does not like to admit that high quality tutoring does increase scores because it would be admitting that students who can afford to pay for test prep have an advantage over those who can't AND that the SAT is a beatable test, which it is.

Despite its reluctance to admit that (high-quality) tutoring matters, the College Board has hypocritically teamed up with Khan Academy to provide "free test preparation." However, this is no different than looking over the paperwork for Driver's Ed, getting in a car by yourself, and teaching yourself how to drive. Sure, you may eventually learn, but the chances of crashing are very high and just not worth it. Working within a set schedule with an instructor who has experience and expertise (and access to a secondary brake and steering wheel) are of course in your favor.

There is little difference between taking the SAT or ACT and learning how to drive. The only real difference is that you can take a bus or have someone drive you to college, but you can't get into the college without the SAT or ACT.

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# ***Creating Your Own Personal Strategy***

Prior to the inception of the current SAT, I found that students who prepared for and took the SAT prior to preparing for the ACT tended to score a little higher on the ACT comparatively.

Why was this the case?

1. The SAT is predominantly a reasoning test whereas the ACT is predominantly a reading and speed test. When students learn how to reason, they learn how to think for these types of tests. When they learn how to think for these tests, they learn how to maneuver the tests with confidence. Since the majority of the ACT relies on speed coupled with reading comprehension ability, students who are proficient reasoners work their way through the questions much more efficiently.
2. Time on task. I typically tutored students for the SAT before the ACT, so the results may have stemmed from the student having spent more time learning and perfecting my methods while gaining confidence and understanding of the ACT. In the New York area, the SAT used to be the only test students took. Then, the ACT started to gain traction, but this has only happened over the last ten years.

Now that the SAT is much more aligned with the ACT, I believe that the determining factor will be the way students react to each test. Some students will score higher on the SAT versus ACT and vice versa. However, it is my opinion that **students should prepare for and take both the SAT and ACT**. It is just a matter of when they should take them. Taking both helps to create the best silver platter with the goal of best presenting the candidate. If a certain test score isn't as strong as others, simply don't submit it to the colleges when you apply. Just keep in mind that it is worth the shot to find out.

## **When are the SAT and ACT administered?**

The SAT and ACT are given the same times every year. The SAT is administered in October, November, January, March, May, and June. The ACT is administered in September, October, December, February, April, and June. As you can see, there are plenty of opportunities to take these exams. Because we want to present ourselves in the best possible light, meaning that our scores are as high as we can get them, creating a Personal Testing Strategy as early as possible is imperative. Parents and students need to figure out schedules over the year to create the best strategy.

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# Creating Your Own Personal Strategy

When you set out to develop your own strategy, there are some important things to consider. Though there are more, here are some to help you get started:

1. **How many AP tests will the test taker be taking?** AP tests are given in May. Students need time to study for these (April) and the last thing we want is to add more stress to an already stressful situation. So, taking the ACT in April and the SAT or ACT in June or the SAT in March and the SAT or ACT in June can help to work around the AP exams. This, of course, depends on the student and how many AP exams he or she is taking.
2. **When will the test taker have to write an English research paper?** Many schools require that students submit a research paper. This paper will be anywhere between three and ten pages. For many students, this is a daunting task. The research process can be tedious and the writing of the research can be even more so. Working around this can limit stress.
3. **When are friends taking the tests?** Although I'm not a proponent of doing what others are doing for the sake of "keeping up with the Joneses," I find that working with others can help

keep students focused on the task at hand. Camaraderie is a great tool to help students do their best and learn more. Also, having others along for the ride is a great way for both students and parents to feel more at ease. Rather than feeling alone, students and parents can work through this time together. Lastly, working with friends allows you to create your own tutoring groups. I find that teaching these groups is fun and that students are engaged because they know each other. When students are relaxed, they tend to have more success. Other advantages to creating your own groups include having the classes in your own home or at a friend's house, setting your own meeting day and time, and the ability to pay group rates. Group rates will always be less expensive than individual rates, so in addition to the positives listed above, the cost of tutoring is deferred.

4. **How strong of a test taker is the student?** If the test taker always complains that he or she is not a good test taker, struggles on tests, or struggles to finish tests, then it is important for him or her to work with a tutor who can show the test taker how to overcome these issues.

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## 5. **What is the test taker's real average?**

First and foremost, the SAT and ACT test students on skills. A student's grades in class almost always include homework and class participation. These scores tend to inflate a student's average a lot. Take a look at scores on reading tests, math tests, and essays. Based on these test scores, what would the student's average be? This information can help you take a more realistic view of the student's abilities in a subject.

Here are two examples of Personal Testing Strategies. Keep in mind there are many ways to do this but the goal is to maximize a student's scores, take advantage of superscoring, and alleviate stress.

- Take the PSAT in October of 11<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Prep for and take the May SAT.
- Prep for and take the June ACT.
- Review for the SAT and ACT during the summer and take the ACT in September and the SAT in October.

Or

- Take the PSAT in October of 11<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Prep for and take the January SAT.
- Prep for and take the March SAT.
- Prep for and take the April ACT.
- Using the results, decide whether to take the June SAT or ACT.

**I'm still a few years away from this process. What should I do?**

Assuming a long term viewpoint is critical to creating the best silver platter. For students in middle school, I recommend taking state assessments. I know there has been a lot of backlash against these tests, but my reasoning is simple: This may be the last time students take a standardized test until 11<sup>th</sup> grade. That may seem like a long way off, but it's really not. Before you know it, that student will be in 11<sup>th</sup> grade gearing up to take the SAT and/or ACT. So, state assessments provide an opportunity for students to experience standardized testing without it affecting their grades. When they are ready take the SAT or ACT, they can always use their experience to help them.

As students approach 10<sup>th</sup> grade, sign up for the PSAT. Take this at the beginning of 11<sup>th</sup> grade as well. The PSAT is an easier version of the SAT and helps to focus students so they understand how challenging these tests are and how they need to work to find success on them.

***If you need help developing a plan for taking these tests, feel free to contact me. I will answer any questions you have and help you figure out the best plan for you.***

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# ***The Importance of High-Quality Tutoring***

Though the SAT and ACT are similar, the biggest issue on the ACT is time. It is true that questions may be more straightforward than the questions on the SAT, but when faced with only thirty seconds to find an answer, students who can reason better have a better chance of getting the answers right.

In the end, students who can outthink the tests without outthinking themselves have the potential to score higher. Unfortunately, most of the skills needed to score well on the SAT and ACT--and I'm not talking about reading and writing--aren't taught in school. Students need to learn new, specialized skills that will help them outthink these tests and think on a level they never knew existed.

That's why high-quality tutoring is so incredibly important.

If there is one skill that is necessary for success on standardized tests that is not taught in school, it is reasoning. In order to find success on standardized tests, there are several reasoning based skills that students need to have in order to find success on the SAT and ACT.

You may have heard the term *inferencing* over the years. Inference questions are some of the more difficult questions that are asked on tests. These questions

demand that students make a prediction based on limited information. This is challenging for most students and students typically pick the incorrect answer. I have found that these skills are very teachable and that success with inferencing is directly correlated to confidence in one's ability.

Other words synonymous with inferencing are *reasoning* and *critical thinking skills*. Reasoning and critical thinking skills also lend themselves to test taking skills, which are absolutely not taught in school unless a teacher makes it a priority to teach students how to reason. 99.9% don't. This is not the fault of the teachers as much as it is that the teachers have to cover way more than "180 days" of curriculum, don't know how to convey the necessary strategies, or most likely *don't know the strategies*. When it comes to the SAT and ACT, a student's ability to work through the test properly, knowing which questions to answer, when to answer them, and how to answer them, are all crucial to success. These skills are teachable and honed through practice. When I show them to my students, the word I usually hear is "Wow!" For me, there is nothing better than watching a student begin to unlock these skills. The reason I use the word unlock is because the ability is already there; someone just has to show the student how to find them.

Now, because the necessary test taking skills aren't taught in school, the foundations of any test preparation

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# ***The Importance of High-Quality Tutoring***

should be strategy, reasoning, and skill building. These fundamentals are paramount and a high-quality tutor can show students how to build on what is there while helping them to think deeper and more abstractly. Doing so allows students to understand that these tests are man-made and therefore can be deconstructed to find the answers.

However, when students are lacking in skills, that much more time must be devoted to fixing any issues to assure that students can work through the test with confidence. My advice is to both tell the tutor about any weaknesses you know of and ask the tutor after a few sessions if there are any areas of weakness. This can be done by the parent or the student. Knowing the weak points early on allows students the chance to sure up any areas in need of improvement and increase the likelihood of success later on. Remember: one or two questions really can make or break an SAT or ACT score. When it comes to preparing for the SAT and/or the ACT, you are preparing the silver platter that will be given to colleges. If a student needs help with basic skills, I advise extra time with the tutor. I'm not telling you to spend more money, but an extra few sessions with a high-quality tutor is a lot cheaper and heck of a lot less stressful than having to pay to go to college without getting credit your freshman year (yes, this exists) or getting bad grades in college because the student lacks the necessary skills. Consider time working on building skills as an investment.

Another incredibly important skill that students need for the SAT, ACT, college, and life is strategy. The best tutors understand strategy and the inherent role it plays in test prep and success. When I sit down with my students, I show them how to take a bigger picture view of the test, section, and questions. Whether we view it through a lens focused on sports, dancing, art, or something else entirely, I find a way to relay to the student the importance of strategy, and especially *developing their own strategy*. (I can't stress enough how important it is for tutors to focus on strategy with their students.) In school, most English teachers tell their students to "read the passage and answer the questions." This can't be any more wrong. The tragedy is that without proper instruction, students walk out of high school without the understanding of how to figure out the same problems they will see in college and the real world. To me, that's a huge problem. In my opinion, one of the major reasons why students don't do as well as they can on the SAT and ACT is that they don't understand and appreciate the role strategy plays on these tests.

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# ***Some Do's & Don'ts of SAT & ACT Prep***

## ***For Parents:***

### **Don't Compare Children to Other Children**

Refraining from this is sometimes difficult, but I can assure that no child wants to hear how great, smart, or diligent his or her brother or sister is. Now, if you're a parent, you know what is best for your child, but resentment can form from the comparison and once resentment springs to life, other problems will start to develop, likely the one thing you want your child to do--work harder.

### **Do Communicate**

There are times that work doesn't get done and other times in which it appears to not get done. If you have concerns about this, speak with the tutor and get feedback. If you are working with a qualified professional and he or she tells you everything is fine, take that as a good thing. If he or she tells you the work is not getting done and that progress isn't being made, communicate with the student and develop a plan to find the time to get the work done.

### **Do Help Students Learn How to Manage Stress**

Can students practice more? Of course! Students can always benefit from more practice. However, sometimes there are other pressures that we don't realize are there. For starters, students don't have the stress management skills that adults have because they don't have the experience. This time in

their lives is a golden opportunity to help them learn how to manage stress so that they can look back on the experience and know how to manage the stress of college life. And believe me, there is a lot without having to prep for these tests and worry (whether or not they say it) if they are going to get into college. I find that it is almost always *if*, and not *when*, and this misconception is very scary.

### **Do Have Faith in the Tutor**

Both parents and students have lots of information that is extremely helpful to the tutor. Be sure to convey this. However, resist the urge to tell the tutor what you want covered and how you want it covered. If you had enough faith in the tutor to hire him, then communicate any weaknesses and strengths that you believe can help focus the instruction. Then, be there to support. I can't begin to tell you how awkward it is to have parents tell me what I should teach and when I should teach it. This puts tutors like me in a really awkward position because we value the parent-teacher relationship, but also have to ready a student for an entire test.

My advice: If you review your child's work and notice a pattern, reach out to the tutor to discuss. For all you know, what you noticed is valuable information that can drive instruction. However, try to resist the urge to drive the instruction yourself; for all you know, you are actually hurting your cause.

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# ***Some Do's & Don'ts of SAT & ACT Prep***

## ***For Students:***

### **Do Schedule Time for YOUR Future**

It's no secret that the SAT and ACT are unbelievably important. So, you need to prioritize your studying for them. If you have a free period during the day, use it to your advantage: go to the library and get some work done. Though it may not seem like fun, getting into the college you really want to go to is. Just think of all the fun you will be having at college thanks to the time you are putting in now. Your future self will thank you.

### **Do Check Over Your Work**

Part of mastering the SAT and ACT is learning how to think for these tests. One of the best ways to do this is to check over your answers. Really take the time to study what you got wrong and what the correct answer is. From there, you need to understand why the answer is what it is. I can't stress how important this is. While checking over the answers, I guarantee you will see patterns in your work. Take note of these. I also guarantee that over time you will find fewer wrong answers. That's what we are after.

### **Don't Expect to Get a Perfect Score**

In school, everyone wants to score 90 or higher on tests. For the most part, getting a 75 on a test isn't what we aspire to, and to many, this is devastating.

However, on the SAT and ACT, getting 75% of the questions right is actually really good and will result in a solid score. So, it's ok to shoot for perfection, but don't get yourself down if the percentage you get isn't great compared to what you usually get on school tests.

### **Do Take This Stuff Seriously**

The average 16 or 17-year old can expect to live until at least 100 years of age. Knowing this information, would you sacrifice a few months or weeks to have a better life over the next 80 or so years? If yes, then this is your chance to do it and set your life up to be the life you want it to be.

### **Do Learn to Use Logic**

How many times have you gotten the answers down to two, only to pick the wrong one? Well, sometimes using logic can really help, and this goes for almost all subject area tests in addition to the SAT and ACT. When down to two answer choices, ask yourself *why is this one wrong?* We are so quick to prove answers right that we don't always think about how to find the right answer. If you can prove the answer choice wrong, then it's wrong; if you can't prove it wrong, then it's right. It's as simple as that.

***Setting Yourself Up for Success***

# Shifting Your Mentality

Even if they have gone through the process with another child, most parents don't know where to start with the SAT and ACT. Some of the questions I am asked revolve around the following:

*What's a good score? How can I get that score?  
How can I increase my score from what it is?*

If students were to take the SAT or ACT a few times without any preparation, they would average out around a certain score. There could be some increase from the first to the last, but chances are students will fall within a 30-point range above or below their first score on the SAT and within a 1-3-point range on the ACT. So what does this mean?

Students will all fall into ranges that indicate what they know and what they don't know. From these scores, a good, experienced tutor should be able to figure out what needs to be addressed and begin to work on increasing scores. However, "increasing scores" is too vague of an idea. Rather, both parents and students should address the task at hand this way: **each time you practice a section or test, all you are trying to do is get 1 to 3 more right per section.**

This approach is very simple, yet very effective. Here's why: without tutoring, students tend to fall within the specific range that I referred to earlier. But, if the test

taker understands that he or she usually gets on average, say, 6 out of 10 questions right, focusing on getting 1 or 2 more right each time isn't that difficult. Going from 60% right on average to 70 or 80% is a tremendous increase. The thing is, if the test taker gets even 1 more right four times, his or her score will increase dramatically overall. Sometimes a simple shift in mentality can have a huge impact on a person's future.

Here's an example from the ACT English section to illustrate my point. The English section has 75 questions on it, broken into 5, fifteen-question passages. If a test taker typically gets 10 out of 15 questions right, he would get 50 out of 75. This equates to a score of approximately 24 out of 36. If he then focuses on improving just one or two questions per section, at a minimum, his score would increase to a 26 and a maximum of approximately 29. Either way, both increases are impressive and could be the difference between getting into one college over another. But we're not done there, let's say the test taker really works hard at learning how to think for this test while learning more about grammar. If he focuses on getting just one or two more right based on this new norm, his score can increase *yet again*.

This simple approach is much easier to grasp and helps to make the daunting task of increasing test scores a reality.

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# Wrapping It All Up

Dear Reader,

I'm a strong believer that information is the most valuable of all things we have. With information, we have the ability to make better decisions that can impact our lives and the lives of others. When dealing with the SAT and ACT, making informed decisions can make what is a stressful time that much less stressful. In doing so, it also allows test takers to focus on the real job at hand: working hard to learn how to master these tests so that they can apply to, and get into, the best possible colleges.

Over the last fifteen years, I have had the pleasure of working with well over a thousand students and their families. The goals are always the same, regardless of background or location: we want what is best for our children. Is the current system of testing the best system? I don't know, but I do that it is the current system and to fight it would be futile. So, together with parents and students, I have had the pleasure of helping my students grow and succeed. I have seen perfect scores, I have seen marked increases, and I have seen disappointment that has led to later success; in the end, though, what I do know is that students of all backgrounds can improve on the SAT and ACT and can get into the colleges of their dreams. It takes work, and it

takes patience, and it takes perseverance, but it is a reality that all students and parents can experience.

I hope that this eBook has helped you in some way. Please let me know if it has, and please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions or would like to work with me. My phone number is (516) 376-8241 and my email is [Laurence.Mechanic@gmail.com](mailto:Laurence.Mechanic@gmail.com). For more information about me, please visit [precisiontestprep.com](http://precisiontestprep.com).

Thanks for reading, and as always, good luck!

Best,



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# ***Recommendations***

## **College Financial Planning & Tax Preparation:**

*Jerry Berger*

*J & B Tax and Accounting*

*(631) 274-4737*

Jerry is one of the most trustworthy and intelligent CPAs you will ever meet. He is extremely knowledgeable, dedicated, and patient. I can't recommend him enough.

## **Websites:**

*Freerice.com*

This is hands-down the best vocabulary practice you can find. Students should start at a level that they believe is challenging and play from there. If they get it wrong, the words become easier. If they get it right, the words become harder. I guarantee that if students play Free Rice for an extended period of time, they will increase their vocabularies ten-fold. It's the best way to learn vocabulary I have ever come across. In addition, the rice that students accumulate is donated to the needy. It's a great way to learn vocabulary and a great way to help those in need.

*Instructables.com*

This is a great website that provides directions to build just about everything. I am big believer in teaching students to think outside the box. This website is great because it allows readers access to ideas they never knew existed.

*Newsela.com*

This website takes articles and changes the writing to match a student's reading level. Questions are also designed to go along with the articles. I use it in class all the time.

## **Apps:**

*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*

Lots of students head to dictionary.com because the name is as easy as it gets. However, in the world of apps, there is no better dictionary app than the Merriam Webster Dictionary App. The app is easy to use, shows synonyms and antonyms, and stores the words that have been looked up.

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