

Demystifying the SAT & ACT:

Introduction

LESSONS

The SAT & ACT Are Games	1
Think Like Your Opponents	2
The Three Score Ingredients	
(1) Substance/Content and (2) Analytical Skills	3
(3) Test Preparation	
• Game Plan	3
• The Night Before	3
• The Morning Of	3
The Pillars of “Wiz-dom”	
I: Use the Structure of the Test	4
II: Restate the Given Information	4
III: Use What You Know	4
IV: Focus on What the Question Asks	4
V: Remember the Answer Is on the Page	5
VI: Don’t Be Intimidated by the Seemingly Difficult	5
Standardized Tests	Video Only
Which Test Should I Take	Video Only
Leveling the Playing Field (4:15)	Video Only

The SAT & ACT Are Games!



Words of "Wiz-dom"— Do you think the tests would be more fun if they were games? **Then consider them as games and preparing will become much easier.** So, let's begin by figuring out what makes a game, a game. Then we'll see if the SAT and ACT have the same characteristics as games.

What are the characteristics of competitive games that involve individuals or teams? Having "opponents" is certainly one. What are some others? After completing your list, put checkmarks in the "SAT/ACT" column that match your list of game characteristics.

The Characteristics of Competitive Games:	SAT/ACT
1) <i>Opponents</i> —	
2)	
3)	
4)	
5)	
6)	
7)	
8)	
9)	
10)	
11)	
12)	
13)	
14)	
15)	

Think Like Your Opponents



Words of "Wiz-dom"—Whenever you play games, the better you understand your opponents, the better you will do. To be successful in any competitive game, you must pay attention to your opponents' strategies. Since your SAT and ACT opponents are the test writers, **the more you understand and pay attention to how they play the game, that is, how they write the questions and what challenges they create for you, the better you will perform.**

The Structure of the Game's Answer Puzzles:

1 Question (stem)

- (A) Poor Answer
- (B) Good Answer
- (C) Better Answer
- (D) Best Answer

This doesn't mean there is one of each. It just means that there will be one answer for which you will get credit. There will be a combination of wrong answers, e.g., 1 *good* one, and 2 *better* ones, but only 1 *best* one.

Let's take a look at an example. Like many questions on the SAT and ACT math tests, there is a diagram that precedes the question. Similarly, there are reading passages that precede the questions on the reading tests. In this example, the diagram becomes part of the stem because it gives you information you need to answer the question.



2 This recent picture of a teenager was taken on a Friday night. What is happening?

- (A) George Washington's father is scolding him about the cherry tree.
- (B) A teenager is polishing his dad's shoes.
- (C) A teen is requesting the keys to his dad's new, luxury car.
- (D) A teenager is looking for a lost contact lens.



Words of "Wiz-dom"— Your opponent gets to decide the "best" answer. Sometimes the best way to get the best answer is to find and eliminate the wrong answers. **Learn to think like your opponents because they develop the puzzle, i.e., write the distracters, AND get to decide the best answer!**



Words of "Wiz-dom"— **ALWAYS** put a slash through wrong answers when you identify them. **ALWAYS** circle the answer you choose in the test booklet before bubbling on your answer sheet. This simple step will help you if you accidentally bubble in the wrong place.

The Three Score Ingredients



Words of “Wiz-dom”—There are **three ingredients in the recipe for success**. Include each of them in your game plan.

Substance or Content

- Math Facts
- Vocabulary and Reading Knowledge
- Essay Structure and Grammar Knowledge

Analytical Skills

- Logic
- Cleverness
- Insight
- Application
- Understanding the Question
- Recognizing “Nonsense” Answers
- Identifying the Best Answer

Test-taking Strategies

- Game Plan (Schedule Your Prep Time)
 - Get Registered
 - Know the Location
 - Set a Target Score
 - Learn the Test Directions
 - Use the NO Guessing Penalty
 - Understand the Test Arrangement
- The Morning Of
 - Dress for Success
 - Brain Food
 - Do Mental Warm-ups
- During the Test
 - Escape the Stress
 - Bubble Wizardly
- The Night Before
 - <https://sat.collegeboard.org/register/sat-test-center-closings>
 - No More Studying
 - Relax
 - No Communications
 - Organize Your Stuff
 - Set Your Alarm

The Pillars of “Wiz-dom”



Words of “Wiz-dom”—These “Pillars” are based on my own experiences and interviews with very successful test takers. Contrary to what you might believe, there are not dozens of test-taking techniques, strategies and tricks. **You only need to know six basic test-taking principles to raise your score.** This program will help you master these fundamental skills: *The Pillars of “Wiz-dom.”*

Pillar I: Use the Structure of the Test

The first thing you learn about any game is its organization and rules. In addition to raising your confidence, taking advantage of the structure of the test is going to raise your score!

- Organization (time and # of questions)
(Pacing Yourself)
- Rules and Directions
- Skipping Around
- 1 correct answer = 1 Point
- Question Content and Format
- Opponents’ Patterns
- Opponents’ Strengths and Weaknesses
-

Pillar II: Restate the Given Information

This pillar is the most important one of all. You can use it for any question type. Being able to convert how a test writer phrases a question into your own words is essential. You will learn how to read between the lines and clarify the underlying meaning of what your opponents tell and ask you.

- Most important pillar
- Clarify what is told to you
- Clarify what is asked of you
- Paraphrasing is critical

Pillar III: Use What You Know

Your opponents and colleges view the SAT and ACT as tests of your reasoning skills. They want to find out if you know how to **apply** the information that you’ve been taught in school. You’ll raise your score because you’ll learn how to use what you know the way your opponents expect. Preparing for the test is more about applying what you know than gaining new knowledge.

Pillar IV: Focus on What the Question Asks

This Pillar is at the root of some of the most common mistakes made by test takers. Don’t be the victim of one of them. The “untrained” brain predicts what the question is going to ask based on years of experience with teacher-made tests. The “trained” brain (which you’ll have by test time) knows to read the question carefully and to answer what is asked. You will also learn how to use the question to guide your approach as you attack the problem.

- Answer the actual question
- Ask: “What do I need to know?” (math)
- Essay prompt
- Answers based only on passage
(Reading and ACT Science)

Pillar V: The Answer Is on the Page

The right answer is directly in front of you. You've just got to find it. It's similar to a treasure hunt. You might go directly to the treasure. On the other hand, your score will go up when you can't answer the question directly but you go on the hunt, eliminating answers until you're left with the right one or a couple possible ones from which you can guess.

- It's a game!!
- Eliminating is rewarded; keeping is dangerous.
- Often answers tell you how to do
- Start with short answer (editing and math)
- Start with middle answers, B or C, (math)

$$\text{question } \pm \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a}$$

Pillar VI: Don't Be Intimidated by the Seemingly Difficult

Test writers, like other opponents, can be intimidating! A facade of apparently indecipherable material camouflages a plethora of facile interrogatories. (Apply Pillar II to restate the previous sentence: Test writers can make the easiest questions look hard!)

- You don't need a perfect score.
- We teach strategies to overcome opponent tricks and traps.
- Practice reduces difficulty
- Pillars boost confidence; confidence raises scores.

Which Test Should I Take?

Pillar I: Use the Structure of the Test(s)

	ACT	SAT
English/Writing (The “Editing” tests – multiple choice questions)	45 Minutes 75 Questions	35 Minutes 44 Questions
Reading	35 Minutes 40 Questions	65 Minutes 52 Questions
Math	60 Minutes 60 Mult. Choice Questions	No Calculator Section (3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 Minutes • 20 Questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 15 Mult. Choice ○ 5 Fill In Blank Calculator Section (4) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 55 Minutes • 38 Questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 30 Mult. Choice ○ 8 Fill In Blank
Science	35 Minutes 40 Questions	Integrated into: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing/Editing • Reading • Math
Essay (Optional)	40 Minutes	50 Minutes
Scoring	Scaled Score 1-36 Average \approx 21	Scaled Score 400-1600 Average \approx 1000