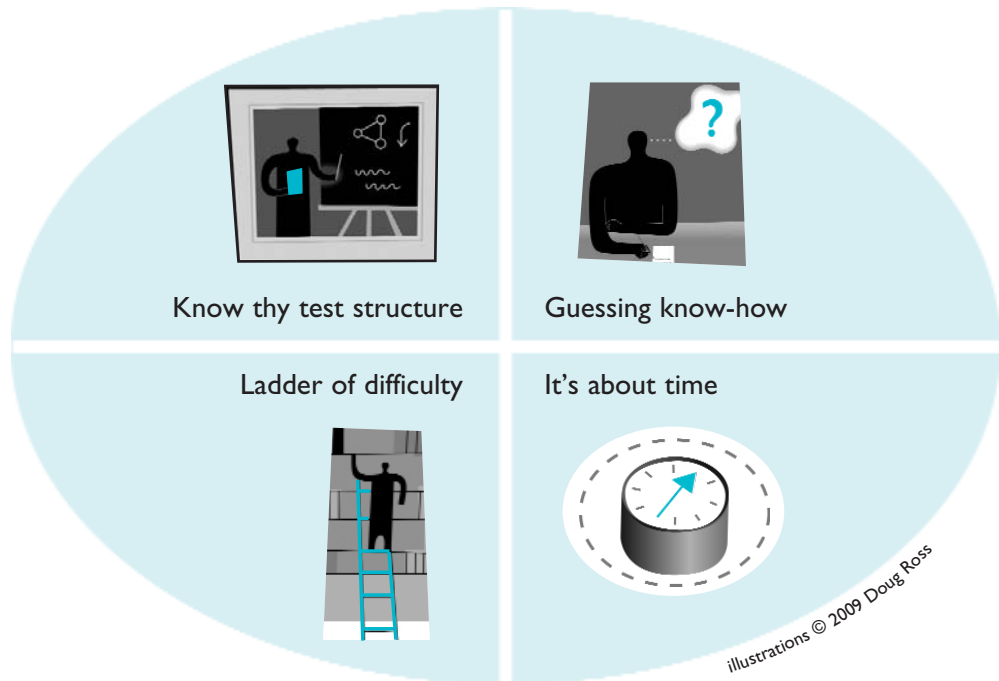


SAT general test strategies

VSAC



- Remember that the SAT is unlike regular school tests:
 1. Difficult questions are worth the same points as easy questions.
 2. If you answer only 66% of the questions correctly, you get a good score.
 3. The SAT measures your reasoning and test-taking skills, not your knowledge.
- Know the directions and question types ahead of time. You'll save time by not having to read the directions during the test.
- Understand the guessing penalty and how to manage it.
 1. You lose a fraction of a point with each wrong answer, but you should guess if you can eliminate a few answers.
 2. Wrong answers and correct guesses tend to cancel each other out, or work for you.
- Eliminate wrong answers through process of elimination. Depending on the difficulty of the question, you may be able to eliminate answers that are obviously wrong — see “ladder of increasing difficulty” below.
- Know how to budget your time. Answer the easy questions first and skip/return to the harder questions.
- Be aware of the ladder of increasing difficulty within each section.
 1. Concentrate on questions in the easy third (first third) and the medium third (middle third) of each section. Skip questions at the end of each section (difficult third).
 2. For trickier questions near the end, be suspicious of answers that are too easy.
 3. For easier questions near the beginning, don't be suspicious of easy answers.
 4. *Exceptions:* The ladder of difficulty does not apply to the sections on reading comprehension, usage, sentence correction, and paragraph correction.

Identifying sentence errors/usage

- Quickly read through the sentence, “listening” for the error.
- Know the most common grammar mistakes:
 1. subject/verb agreement
 2. pronoun agreement
 3. adjective/adverb confusion
- Look for errors in idiom — words or phrases that are particular to our language because of what they mean when they are used together. Examples:
 1. We listen to someone, not listen at someone.
 2. A song is written by a composer, not from a composer.
 3. We go to the top of the hill, not at the top on the hill.
- Remember that some sentences have no error (answer choice E).

Essay writing

- See the handout “writing the 25-minute essay.”
- Practice, practice, practice.

Improving sentences

- Read the entire sentence before looking at the choices.
- Read the sentence slowly so that your brain does not automatically correct and thus miss the error.
- Remember that answer choice A is always the same as the original sentence.
- Compare each choice to the original to help clarify the difference.
- Know the common problem areas in sentences:
 1. noun/verb agreement
 2. parallelism
 3. placement of modifiers (adjectives and adverbs)

Improving paragraphs

- Quickly read each paragraph before answering questions; even questions focusing on individual sentences ask you to look at the sentence in context.
- Know the different types of questions:
 1. questions on general organization
 2. questions that involve revising sentences
 3. questions that involve combining sentences
- Try all the suggestions before picking the “best” answer.
- Make sure that your answer makes sense in the context of the entire passage and the surrounding sentences.
- Look for wordiness, redundancy, and vague pronouns.

Sentence completion

- Make connections between the ideas in the sentence. Once you understand the connections, you can pick the best choice to complete the connection.
- Know the commonly used connections:
 1. contrast (although, but, by contrast, despite, however, nevertheless, on the other hand, yet)
 2. similarity (as...as, in the same way, like, likewise, resembles, same, for example, such as)
 3. restatement (in fact, in other words, namely, that is, in short)
 4. cause and effect (as a result, causes, consequently, due to, leads to, produces, therefore, thus)
- In each sentence, look for clues that signal connections (see words in parentheses above).
- Come up with your own answer before you look at the possible choices; then scan for an answer that's similar to yours.
- Work by process of elimination.

Critical reading

- Questions are arranged in chronological order as they occur in the passage, so the answers will appear within the passage in chronological order too (no ladder of increasing difficulty).
- Focus on main ideas when reading (main ideas are usually expressed in the first or last sentences of paragraphs).
- Know the typical structure of passages:
 1. several theories/approaches to a single topic
 2. one theory illustrated with several examples
 3. one theory supported by several arguments
 4. pro-and-con arguments on both sides of an issue
 5. comparison/contrast between two events, ideas, people
 6. cause and effect showing how one event led to another
- Mark up the passage as you read. Mark the main ideas of the entire passage and the main ideas within each paragraph.
- Before reading the passage, read the question stems (but NOT the answers).
- When you're answering the questions, look back to the passage for reference.
- Don't pick the first choice that sounds good.
- Don't pick an answer just because it sounds familiar.
- For two/dual passage, answer the questions that deal with the first passage only, then the questions that deal with the second passage only, then tackle the questions that deal with both passages.
- Save this section for last; complete the other verbal sections first.

Math multiple choice

- When in doubt, try multiple strategies.
 1. Look at the answers and plug them in to see if they work (start with the middle answer).
 2. Substitute numbers for variables.
- Remember the ladder of increasing difficulty; questions are arranged from easy to difficult.
- Make sure you understand exactly what the question is asking.
- Round off and “guesstimate” freely.
- Word problems — build an equation that will yield the answer you want.
- Break down the problem into parts and translate each part into a numerical expression.
- With geometry problems, look at the diagram for clues.
- If there is no diagram, sketch one.
- Avoid lengthy calculations and working with big numbers.
- Use your calculator sparingly.
- Know the question types:
 1. numbers and operations
 2. algebra and functions
 3. geometry and measurement
 4. data analysis, statistics, and probability

Math grid-ins

- There is no guessing penalty in this section, so guess if you can do so intelligently.
- Practice filling in the grid so you don’t make mistakes during the test.
- Use the division sign (/) to enter fractions.
- Make decimal values as precise as the grid allows.
- Fill in any correct answer; don’t debate whether one correct answer is better than another.
- Avoid negative answers or other answers that are impossible to grid.
- Never try to grid a mixed number.



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