

7 Tough Questions - *and Answers* - About the New SAT



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BONUS: What Should I Do Next?

I N T R O

Big Changes Are Coming...

But Change Is Nothing New



The SAT has been around for nearly a century and has remained in a near constant state of alteration from the start. Its rate of evolution has accelerated in the last few decades, however, with major changes in 1994 and 2005 and now a sweeping redesign for the class of 2017 and beyond. The new SAT will be hardly recognizable to those who took the SAT prior to 1994.

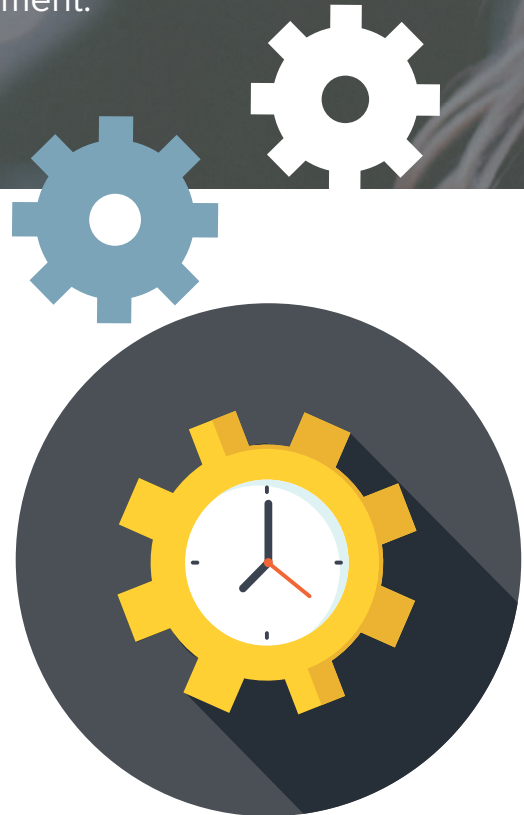
This redesign generates important questions for students. While the factual details of the overhaul are now known and comprehensively addressed in our new SAT course book, in our *College Admission Testing Guide*, and on our website, this resource covers some of the more nuanced issues and consequences of the forthcoming changes.

QUESTION

Why Is the SAT Changing?

The redesigned SAT (March 2016) is a brand new test with a redefined mission. Once merely a college admissions differentiator, it will now also serve as a de facto high school capstone exam and guidance instrument.

The College Board aims to make the new SAT look and feel more relevant and align it with certain prescribed teaching and college readiness benchmarks such as Common Core standards. But that is not cause for concern. Although the changes are significant, the new test simply strives to better assess the universal math and verbal skills widely thought to matter most in college.



“The SAT must reflect the kinds of meaningful, engaging, rigorous work that students must undertake in the best high school courses being taught today, thereby creating a robust and durable bond between assessment and instruction.”

- David Coleman, President, College Board

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QUESTION

How Is the SAT Changing?

Some observers contend that a loss in market share to the ACT has driven change at the College Board. Designers of the new SAT have ACT and Common Core upbringings, while content developers at ACT were once involved in SAT construction. Consequently, the perceived and actual differences are fading away as the traits of the two tests converge. The SAT has dropped its deduction for wrong answers while the ACT has altered its essay assignment to resemble that of the new SAT. Both essay tasks now prioritize analysis and evidence over style and opinion.

Thematic Elements of the Redesigned SAT

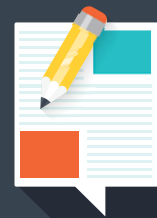
Grammar, Usage & Punctuation

Students will be challenged to revise extended prose and proofread for errors in grammar, punctuation, and word choice.



Vocabulary in Context

Students will be challenged to derive meaning from context and close reading. Pure “vocabulary” skills will be de-emphasized with the elimination of Sentence Completions.



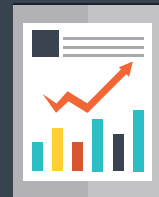
Evidence Based Responses

Students will be challenged to use evidence to support answer choices. Students will no longer contend with a “guessing penalty,” and multiple choice items will have only 4 answer choices. The changes reward identifying evidence over guessing and test-wiseness.



Math Relevancy and Fluency

Students will be challenged to deepen their focus on the skills identified as the most important for college and career success. Emphasis is added to algebraic problem solving and to data analysis. Trigonometry is added, while geometry item count is reduced.



Text & Data

Students will be challenged to analyze, reconcile, and extrapolate from information conveyed through passages and graphical data representations presented across all subjects.



Source Material

Students will be challenged to engage with multi-disciplinary content that emphasizes texts in history, social studies, and science and, on some questions, will draw upon U.S. founding documents or “The Great Global Conversation.”



New SAT Comparison Chart

Current SAT (Through January 2016)

Test Length (Minutes)	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80	85	90	95	100	105	110	115	120	125	130	135	140	145	150	155	160	165	170	175	180	185	190	195	200	205	210	215	220	225	230				
Sections	25 min					25 min					20 min					25 min					25 min					10 min					25 min					25 min					20 min					25 min				
Subject	Critical Reading										Essay					Writing (MC)										Mathematics										Variable														
Score	200-800															200-800										200-800										Unscored														

Redesigned SAT (March 2016 -)

Sections	65 min										35 min					25 min										55 min										50 min				
Subject	Reading										Writing & Language										Mathematics										Optional Essay									
Score	200-800																				200-800										2-8, 2-8, 2-8									

ACT (Revised Essay as of September 2015)

Sections	45 min					60 min										35 min					35 min					40 min				
Subject	English					Mathematics										Reading					Science					Optional Writing				
Score	1-36					1-36										1-36					1-36					1-36				

The new SAT favors fewer, but longer, sections compared to its predecessor. It is now much more like the ACT in its rhythm and pace.



Notes:

The current SAT actually follows an irregular section order because of the changing placement of the Variable (“Experimental”) section. Sections are grouped by subject in order to facilitate comparison with the other exams. The redesigned SAT sections will appear in the order presented. No calculators are allowed on the shorter Math section. Although the new ACT Writing Test (Essay) will receive a 1-36 score starting with the September administration, the score will not be part of the ACT Composite score.

Is the New SAT Easier or Harder?

Old or new, the SAT (and ACT) will always be a measure of relative standing. While it may be rational for an individual student to sample different tests to see which one seems “easier,” describing standardized, norm-referenced tests as “easier” or “harder” misses the point. Such claims by testing pundits are dubious because they tend to overlook scaling and concordance and focus only on the perceived difficulty of new questions.

Q U E S
T I O N

Tests can be made similar, but they cannot be made identical. Every scale is a bit different from exam to exam, ensuring that it is not easier or harder to achieve a particular score on any particular date. The equating process is designed so that fluctuations in the raw difficulty or performance on a test can be linked back through time and through known tests to a reference group.

There is also a common misunderstanding of how tests are scored and a mistaken notion that the pool of test takers on a given date affects the curve. Curves do not pertain to specific test dates but rather to an entire cohort of test takers in a calendar year. The SAT is not scaled in the colloquial sense of assigning a score to a limited number of students. Instead, it is normed using the aforementioned

reference group. This statistical time travel is accomplished through anchor items. With enough of these anchor items, a current tester is placed on the same scale as someone taking a test in the past. This makes the scaling independent of the mix of students taking the exam.

The College Board will eventually provide data so that colleges can fairly compare applicants who submit different tests, and test makers are working to ensure that tests remain reliable and that scores remain comparable. In reality, cohorts change little from year to year, which is why the average SAT score should remain relatively stable.

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QUESTION

What Will My New Scores Mean?

Caution must be applied when comparing scores from the new SAT to the old SAT and to the ACT. The College Board has not promised that the new distribution of scores will perfectly match the old and it must leave the door open for slight re-centering: a necessary mapping of previous scores to new scores so that colleges can fairly compare applicants who submit different tests.

While a 500 on the old test will not equate to a 400 or 600 on the new, variations of 10-40 points at certain places on the scale are possible. Comparisons will become clearer with the release of PSAT scores by January 2016 and the first SAT scores in May 2016.

Further complicating matters for the next few years, comparing a new SAT score to an ACT score will only be possible through a “derived concordance” in which scores on the new SAT are mapped to scores on the old SAT and then in turn to the ACT. A degree of guesswork has always been involved when using practice test scores to gauge performance and decide between the SAT and ACT, and this will be especially true for the next few years until several official tests are released and a formal concordance study is done.

While the uncertainty around the new SAT may drive a majority of the class of 2017 students to the ACT, an eventual return to equilibrium is likely. The College Board’s longer term interest is to ensure that the new SAT has enough predictive validity to remain relevant in admissions. To accelerate those findings, the College Board is administering the new SAT to a cohort of college freshmen, so results can be compared to first-year GPA. This will be a small, interim predictive validity study that will be supplanted by a more comprehensive study using the actual class first affected by the redesign. But that study can’t begin until the summer/fall of 2018, with a report due in June of 2019. Until then, students, counselors, and colleges will need to trust scores to mean what they are said to mean.

5 QUESTION

What Are All These New Subscores? Will They Impact Admission?

The new SAT reports more scores than ever before. The College Board will provide an array of scores that range from a single composite to multiple granular measures of skill and knowledge.

1. **One Total Score** (400-1600 scale)

At the top is a single composite score that is the sum of two section scores.

2. **Two Section Scores** (200-800 scale)

Previously, SAT scores were reported in three sections: Critical Reading, Math, and Writing (including a required essay), with a maximum combined score of 2400. The redesigned SAT consolidates the verbal elements into one section score but excludes the now-optional essay from the verbal section score. The essay score is reported separately.

3. **Two Test Scores** (10-40 scale)

The practical purpose of test scores is to separate and compare reading and writing performance within the verbal section. This reporting level somewhat resembles the scoring convention of the current SAT and provides the basis for the new Section Scores.

4. **Two Cross-Test Scores** (10-40 scale)

These scores are based on questions in all three test areas (Reading, Writing, and Math)

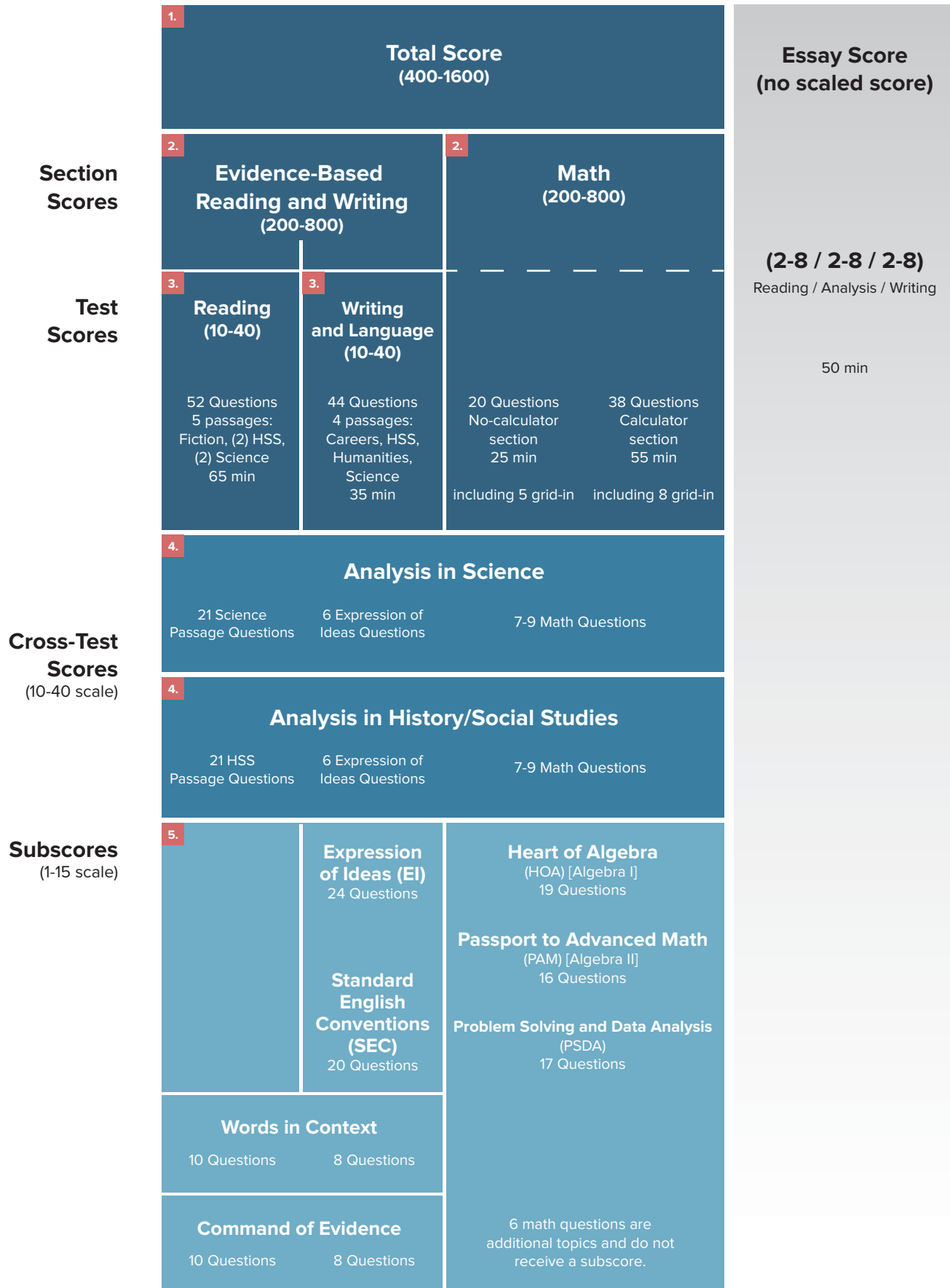
that challenge students to analyze texts and problems in these cross-test subjects.

5. **Seven Subscores** (1-15 scale)

Subscores are intended to provide deeper insight into student readiness by measuring performance in specific skill and knowledge areas. They appear on all of the tests within the vertical suite of assessments. They are therefore perhaps most relevant to high schools to monitor growth through grades and evaluate curriculum and instruction.

As the new SAT is asked to do more, it must report more. That's not to say that colleges will use all scores in the admissions process. Realistically, colleges will most likely remain focused on what they have traditionally found to be predictively valid. **On the new SAT, the two Section Scores (200-800 scale) will be what matter most.** While colleges will receive the full array of scores outlined above, it is unlikely that the more detailed measures will factor significantly into admissions decisions.

The New SAT Breakdown



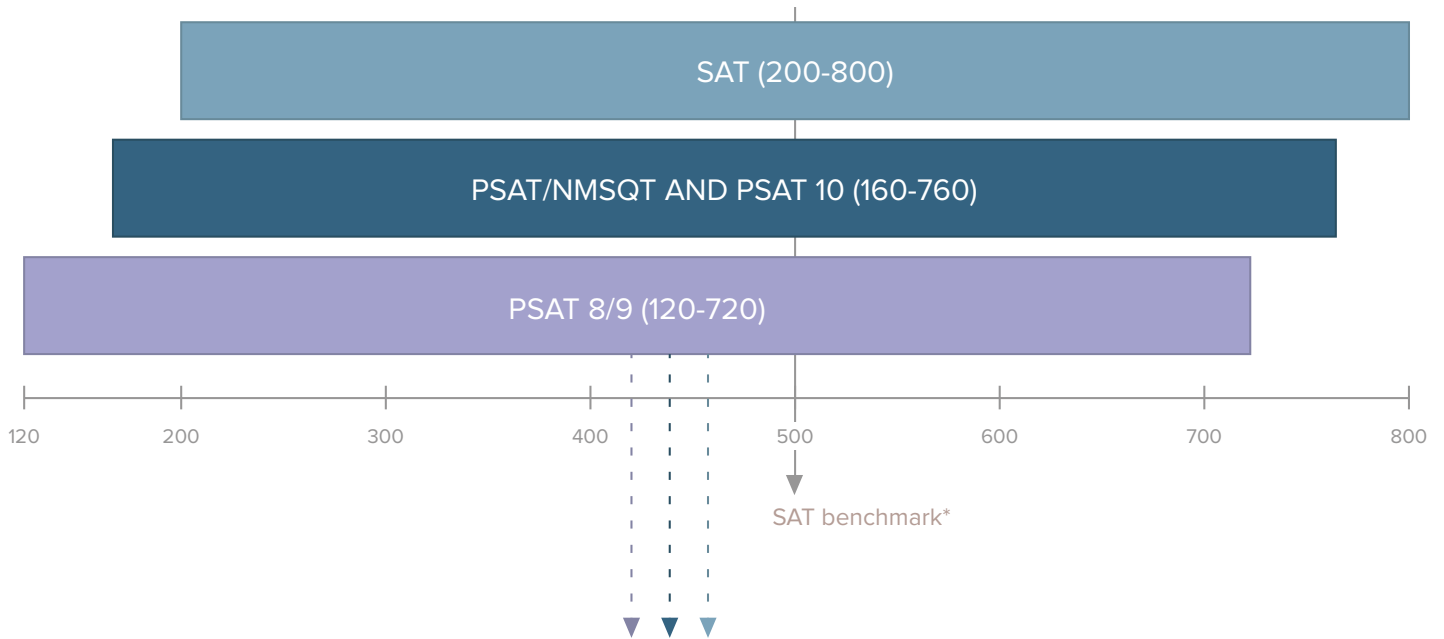
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QUESTION

Why Can't I Get an 800 on the PSAT?

The redesigned SAT is part of a bigger initiative. It anchors a vertically aligned longitudinal assessment system that includes the all-new PSAT 8/9 for 8th and 9th graders, PSAT 10 for 10th graders, and PSAT/NMSQT for 11th graders (and optionally for 10th graders). These tests are built upon a single empirical backbone, so as students advance through high school, the scope and difficulty of the tests increase accordingly. The suite of assessments contains different tests for students at different academic stages of development, but the tests share one continuous scale (120-800).

Vertical Scaling of Assessments



* Grade-level benchmarks will indicate if students are making "on target" progress toward the SAT benchmark.

Because lower level tests focus on earlier concepts, they are limited to lower bands of the full scale (see graphic on previous page). The SAT tests higher concepts so its maximum potential score is higher. The vertically aligned scale more accurately predicts a student's SAT score "now," indicating a likely SAT score if it had been taken instead of the PSAT on that day. This "staircase" model makes it easier to track a student's progress over time on a continuum.

The PSAT/NMSQT is only offered on Wednesday, October 14th in 2015. The College Board plans to resume its Saturday-administration option in October 2016. Schools can offer it to both juniors and sophomores (if they choose not to offer the PSAT 10) but only juniors are eligible for National Merit recognition. Most schools plan to combine the two grades in October rather than schedule separate events. Both versions of the PSAT will be on a 160-760 scale.

The PSAT 10 is a new option and will not be offered at all schools. It will match the PSAT/NMSQT in content and structure. On both tests, sophomore-normed percentiles will be reported. Schools may offer it anytime during a two-week testing window in the spring.

The PSAT 8/9 will debut in the fall of 2015. This replaces the ReadStep exam. Schools can elect to offer it or not (most are not) and will be able to schedule it within a testing window that runs from September to February, or in an additional two-week window in the spring. This test will be on a 120-720 scale.



THESE TESTS ARE BUILT UPON A SINGLE EMPIRICAL BACKBONE, SO AS STUDENTS ADVANCE THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL, THE SCOPE AND DIFFICULTY OF THE TESTS INCREASE ACCORDINGLY.



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What Will Colleges Require? What Will They Expect?

Colleges understandably disfavor sweeping changes to their longitudinal data sets, so it's safe to assume the normal shape of the bell curve of scores will remain intact. Overall, scores at the high end of the scale will remain relatively rare; most students will score in the 400-600 range on each section. Concordance will match students who take both the new SAT and the ACT and calculate that relationship. So despite all of the changes related to testing, the handling of scores in the admissions process should remain the same.

Admissions officers are accomplished forecasters and decision-makers, so it stands to reason that they are pragmatic, sensible, and knowledgeably engaged. They like information and reliable data; they understand context; and they look to the past to predict the future.

Colleges, therefore, will not constrain themselves by eliminating choices. As the ultimate end-users of test scores, colleges are facing a corresponding transition and will behave rationally to keep options open. **To be clear, colleges will accept any and all test scores — old SAT, new SAT, and/or ACT — from the class of 2017.** Many colleges have already officially stated this policy; the rest eventually will.

Accepting — and fairly weighing — old SAT, ACT, and new SAT scores is the smartest choice for building the best possible class. A liberal policy also lays the groundwork for the future. Admission offices ultimately must discard much of what they know about the current SAT and quickly learn the new SAT. Admitted students from the class of 2017 will provide the basis for colleges' own validity studies.

So, in the end, sensible test takers realize that their testing choices will be supported by colleges — not as lip service, but as a purposeful decision in the colleges' best interests.

The SAT Essay will no longer be required of everyone who takes the SAT; individual colleges and universities will determine whether they choose to require SAT Essay scores from prospective students. Compass strongly recommends that all students complete the optional essay every time they take the new SAT because many colleges will want it. The UCs will require the essay as will many colleges that used the previously non-optional essay in their admissions consideration.

If colleges don't officially require the essay, they may still formally recommend it. This sets an expectation of most students without automatically disqualifying certain applicants. The College Board maintains an incomplete but growing database of college policies related to the essay. While many colleges are still undecided or absent from this list, we believe it's prudent to opt into the essay on both the SAT and ACT.



**COLLEGES WILL ACCEPT ANY
AND ALL TEST SCORES — OLD
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FROM THE CLASS OF 2017.**

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What Should I Do Next?

By reading this far, you're already far ahead of most. If you're curious and want to see where you stand, the next step is to take a proctored diagnostic test.

Compass offers proctored diagnostic testing for the new PSAT and new SAT every weekend, starting August 15th.

Above is an example of the cover page of a 4-page diagnostic report you'll receive from us.

Contact your director to further discuss any of the topics covered here or to arrange a full-length practice test soon.



Northern California

norcal@compassprep.com
1100 Larkspur Landing Cir, Suite 280
Larkspur, CA 94939
(800) 620-6250

Southern California

socal@compassprep.com
9100 Wilshire Blvd, Suite 520E
Beverly Hills, CA 90212
(800) 925-1250