

HOW SOON SHOULD TEST PREP START ?

Most students wait until they are in their junior or senior year before they start preparing for the SAT and ACT. Unfortunately, this can actually be a BIG mistake! The longer students wait to start preparing, the less time they have to improve. Taking the test is too important to put off. Scoring high on this test could mean both acceptance into the perfect college and the scholarships to pay for it.

PSAT and SAT

Here are five successful secrets to scholarships and free college money that many public and private schools students are not aware of:

1. **Realize** that full scholarships can be obtained by students who receive certain scores on their PSAT/NMSQT or SAT tests. You can have colleges begging you to enroll and who will gladly pay your way. There are usually several full-rides available in each department of most colleges and they love to give them to kids with good test scores.
2. **Understand** that the PSAT/NMSQT and the SAT tests are tests of logic. They are not about exclusive knowledge or curriculum only learned at public or private schools. Many smart kids (from all academic backgrounds) do poorly on these tests because they don't understand the test or how to look at the questions logically.
3. **Discover** that succeeding on these tests can be just a matter of learning the test-taking techniques and recurring patterns found on these standardized tests. The questions very often point you to the answers and students can learn to answer them quickly once they discover the secret methods that many others successful test-takers have.
4. **Create** a successful game plan. After learning the secret strategies of decoding these tests, incorporate this information into your school day. Spend twenty minutes a day or an hour or two a week practicing these techniques on actual tests from the College Board. This will also keep students from cramming at test time.
5. **Prepare** your sophomores and juniors to take the PSAT/NMSQT for practice in October. The junior year is when it counts for all the big scholarship money. Students should take the real SAT test when their practice scores are above 1500 (the national average) or if they are a senior. The SAT is offered seven times a year and there is no penalty for taking it many times. Colleges usually drop the lowest scores (they don't average them) and some schools will even take the highest score from each section from different tests.

The key to doing well on the SAT is learning the recurring patterns, hidden strategies and the test taking techniques that are universally effective on every test. Then PRACTICE is the key. It's one thing to have a toolbox, and another to know how to use the tools. As students continue to make practicing a priority, they will be able to answer questions faster and solve problems more accurately. The SAT and PSAT/NMSQT are tests of logic and critical thinking. They are not IQ tests. This means they are not fact-based, content-intensive exams that require students to regurgitate what they learned in school. These tests must be approached with a logical foundation; otherwise when students attempt to tackle them like normal tests, they fail. Even really smart students with high GPAs who take AP and honors classes bomb these tests! Test-makers design these tests to trick the "Average Joe" and reward the student with a critical eye. It's all the more reason students need extra time to start preparing.

Ideally, ALL 9th graders should learn how to take the PSAT/NMSQT and SAT (7th grade if they are doing the DUKE TIP Letter or other talent searches). The PSAT/NMSQT qualifies students for scholarships during their junior year. It is created by the ETS (The same division of The College Board that writes the SAT). The two tests are almost identical, so as students study for the PSAT/NMSQT, in turn they will be preparing for the SAT.

Don't worry if your student doesn't have "all" the math down. The mere fact that they are learning how to take the test is the most important factor. The math will eventually come, so in the meantime they can be working on the others sections: Critical Reading and Writing. It is like a marathon— no one starts out running 26 miles the first day. Runners start out slow and build up to the entire distance. In the same manner, students need only spend about 30 minutes to an hour a week as a ninth grader on these tests. Eventually they will build up to more hours and then full-length tests.

Keep in mind there is a wrong way and a right way to practice for the SAT and PSAT/NMSQT. Start by learning to find the recurring patterns on the test, and then continue by practicing using only materials from the test-makers themselves (The College Board). Then, as students practice, it is imperative that they go back over the questions they miss and identify their weaknesses and common mistakes so they can avoid these bad habits in the future.

Any coach will tell you that concentrated energy and numerous hours of practice is the only way to improve at a sport. The same approach applies to the SAT. Incorporating quality study patterns on a daily basis can give students the skills they need to succeed.

By making the PSAT/NMSQT and SAT a priority in the early high school years, students can avoid cramming at the last minute on a test that has very little to do with content. Learning the logical approach to test-taking as soon as possible is the key to doing well. An early start to test preparation will lessen test anxiety and put time back on the side of the student.