

# The Top 10 Tips for SAT Success

An expensive, private SAT tutor's top 10 tips to help you raise your score

## **Tip #1: Your mindset is the key**

Confidence is king.

Henry Ford, the guy who started the car company, once said, “Whether you think you can or can’t, you’re right.”

You have to believe that you’re going to be successful. That makes all the difference.

There are limitations, of course. If I were confident of playing basketball in the NBA, I’d be a delusional idiot because it’s not going to happen.

The same thing is true if I had to take a test right now on 17th Century French Literature. I could have all the confidence in the world and I would still fail it big time.

Fortunately for us, the SAT isn’t 17th Century French Literature. It’s not rocket science. It’s not brain surgery. You already know most of what they’re testing you on. You already know most of what you have to know to do way better on the SAT than you thought was possible based on your PSAT score.

You just have to bone up a little bit and practice doing it.

So be confident and believe in yourself. Expect a positive outcome. If you get discouraged and feel like you won’t reach your goal, your motivation to keep studying will weaken. Expect to be successful and your motivation will stay strong.

## **Tip #2: Focus - The biggest thing you can do to improve your score**

Focus is the most important factor in getting the best score possible. When you’re taking the SAT, if you’re not paying full attention at every moment, you’ll get questions wrong when you know how to get them right.

Answers that seem right but are actually wrong are built into every section of the test. That’s why you have to sharpen your focus. Whether you’re starting with a 500 in each section and working toward a 550, or you’re starting with a 750 and working for a perfect score, working on sharpening your focus gives you the most bang for your buck. It’s the absolute, number one key at all score levels.

**For our purposes, we could say that focus is placing your full attention exactly where it needs to be at any given moment.**

Want an example?

If you're driving, ideally your attention should be on the cars around you. If you look down at your radio for a moment, placing your attention there instead, and at that same moment the car in front of you stops short, you might hit him.

If you weren't looking down, it wouldn't happen.

That's losing your focus. It's having your attention on the wrong thing.

When you're driving, losing your focus can cause an accident. When you're taking the SAT, it can cause you to get a problem wrong when you know how to get it right.

When you're taking the SAT, if you notice that your mind has wandered and you've started daydreaming, go back to the last point you can remember and put your attention back on your task.

There's no reason to get down on yourself. Getting distracted and losing your focus is something that happens to everyone. Especially if you have a moment of frustration, anger, and feeling badly about yourself-- the regular every day stuff.

Work on your focus in your every day life. It will help you a lot when you take the SAT. It's the single biggest key to improving your score, especially in a short period of time.

### **Tip #3: Only study with official College Board SAT material**

You have to know exactly what's going to be on the test. Pattern recognition is extremely important. The only way to do that is to use official material.

Do not use books made by Kaplan, Princeton Review or any other test prep company (unless you've already used up all of the official College Board material). If you do, when you go in to take the SAT, part of your brain will be saying, "something about this just isn't right."

Sure, if you had a lot of time and you were going to spend, for example, 4 weeks just working on math, it would be OK to use those books. They can teach you math and help you with grammar, but they can't train your mind to recognize what the test is going to be like.

Fortunately, there's plenty of official material available. For example, you could:

- 1) Download the free Official SAT Practice Test. You can find it at [www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/prep\\_one/test.html](http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/prep_one/test.html).
- 2) Get "The Official SAT Study Guide, 2nd Edition", by the College Board. You can order it online or get it at a bookstore.

3) The College Board has an online course which you can find at their website, [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com). If you get this, don't take the tests online. Make sure you print them, because that's the way you'll be taking the SAT on test day.

#### **Tip #4: To raise your SAT score, practice going slow**

I know what you're thinking. Going slow isn't right. It's a timed test. That's part of what makes the SAT hard. When test day comes, there's a time limit. There's no getting around it.

Think about this, though.

When you rush, you make mistakes that you wouldn't otherwise make. You get more problems wrong, so you get a lower score. That ruins your confidence, which makes you nervous. And what happens when you're nervous? You rush.

You first have to practice without timing yourself so you develop your confidence. Then you have to practice doing each section in the allotted time.

#### **Tip #5: You can improve your SAT Math score without learning any more math when you learn how to answer correctly every single question that you know how to do**

Another way to say it is eliminate your "careless" mistakes.

It's simple and obvious, but I'll bet that you got several, if not many, questions wrong yesterday when you knew perfectly well how to do the problem. It happens to everyone.

Now you might say, "Well, if it happens to everyone, it's not a big deal."

You'd be right, too, for a lot of things. But not for the SAT, not when your chances of admission to the college of your choice are riding on your score.

Because the SAT Math section is so steeply curved, when you get a few extra questions wrong, it's killing your score.

If you get 5 additional questions right, you'll raise your score about 50 points, unless you're already close to a 700 or higher. Then getting 5 additional questions right will raise your score a lot more than that.

The key is to stop thinking of them as "careless" mistakes. It's really all about focus.

## **Tip #6: The most important thing to focus on in the reading passages is the main idea of the passage**

Students who have trouble with the reading passages often get stuck on the details and miss the main idea of the passage.

Sometimes when you read a passage, you may get confused by certain words, sentences, or even whole paragraphs. You might be tempted to re-read those parts until you understand exactly what they mean. Don't do it, it's a waste of valuable time.

Why?

Because most of what's confusing you is details, but not all of the details will be referred to in the questions. If they don't ask you about them, you don't have to know them. That's why it's important that you don't get caught up in the details as you read.

Which details do you have to know? They'll tell you. Any question that asks about specific details from the passage will refer you back to specific lines. When that happens, you do need to go back and re-read lines, and usually a little bit before and after as well.

You do have to know the main idea, which for our purposes includes the author's opinion on the topic if his opinion is clear. Most of the questions, even if they're about specific details, relate back to the main idea in some way.

That's why once you know the main idea, almost all of the questions get a lot easier. In fact, when using the process of elimination, after you're done crossing off the answers that are obviously wrong, if you're not sure which of the remaining answers is the best choice, pick pick the one that most closely reflects the main idea of the passage.

## **Tip #7: Use the vocabulary you already know to maximize your score on the Sentence Completions**

For the sentence completion questions with only 1 blank, follow these steps.

1. Read the sentence. Don't look at the answers yet.
2. Choose a word or phrase on your own that more or less fits in the blank. There's often a word or a phrase in the sentence that does the trick.
3. If you can't think of a word or phrase, decide whether the word that goes there is positive or negative, good or bad. You can almost always tell at least this much.
4. Now it's time to look at the answers. Use the process of elimination. Cross off any answer choices that don't work. If you don't know the word, leave it in. It's very important that you don't cross off a word just because you don't know it.
5. At this point you may know the answer. If you don't, and you crossed out at least 2 choices, ask yourself if you have an educated guess. If you do, pick it.

For the sentence completion questions with 2 blanks, the key is to work with each blank separately, one at a time, rather than do them both together.

One of the blanks is usually easier. Start with that one, and do the same steps we used for the sentences with 1 blank. You'll eliminate some answer choices and have only a few remaining.

Now look at the other blank, repeat the process, and eliminate the answer choices that don't work for that blank. Usually, you'll have only 1 or 2 choices left and you should make an educated guess.

**Tip #8: On the Writing section, learn a few simple grammar rules and learn what the SAT is testing for. Then you can use use your ear for everything else.**

The College Board knows that we speak differently than we write. When we speak, most of us commonly "break the rules" of grammar. Yet for the most part, we understand each other pretty well.

When we write, however, usually we have to follow the rules. The College Board knows which rules we commonly break when we speak, so it's testing you on them on the SAT.

They do that by writing the way we speak and seeing if you can catch the errors. They know that if you're not focused on your work, you'll rush and miss many of them. They also know that if you try to check every little word for proper grammar, you'll get totally confused.

**The way out of the trap is to learn to recognize what they repeatedly test for and explicitly check those items by rule. Then use your ear for everything else.**

If you follow that basic method and the sentence seems fine the way it is, then it probably is fine. Leave it the way it is.

Here are the most important things you have to check by rule:

- 1) Subject-verb agreement
- 2) Proper pronoun use
- 3) Proper comparison

The first 2 come up a lot. Focus on them. Then use your ear.

**Tip #9: When writing the SAT essay, you have to spend some time planning before you start writing. That's the key to maximizing your score.**

You'll do a much better job on your essay if you brainstorm what you're want to write about before you start. Spend 3 to 5 minutes on this.

Here are the steps:

- 1) Read the prompt, and decide whether you agree or disagree.
- 2) Brainstorm examples that can help you prove your point.
- 3) Pick the best 2 examples to use in your essay, unless you're writing about something you know a lot about, in which case that can be your only example.
- 4) If you can't come up with 2 good examples, take the opposite position and repeat steps 2 and 3.
- 5) Write out your thesis statement in the form, "I believe X because of "Y".
- 6) Write a very short outline of your paper.
- 7) Begin writing your essay.

**Tip #10: Eliminate stress the night before and the day of the SAT. That's the final step towards maximizing your score.**

Stress is the enemy. It robs you of your ability to perform at your best. Confidence, focus, motivation, and relaxation allow you to perform at your best.

Here are some essential final steps that can help you stay relaxed and stress free.

1. Make sure you have everything you need laid out the night before. This includes your calculator, extra batteries, a bunch of number 2 pencils, your admission ticket, your picture ID, and directions to the test site. Believe me, you do not want to be running around looking for these things at 7 AM.
2. Get a good night of sleep. Don't, however, sleep way longer than you usually do. Get 8 hours of sleep, but unless you normally sleep 10 hours, for example, don't sleep 10 hours tonight. When you sleep longer than you usually do, you tend to feel tired the next day.
3. Eat a good breakfast, but do not eat much more than you usually do. If you normally don't eat much for breakfast and tomorrow you eat a really big breakfast, your body won't be used to that much food. The last thing you want is for your stomach to feel bad while you're taking the SAT.
4. Bring something to eat during the breaks, and before the test starts if you didn't eat much at home. It's a long day. You'll probably get hungry. Being hungry is distracting. You don't want to be thinking about lunch while you're taking the SAT.
5. Bring water. You'll get thirsty, and that's as distracting as being hungry. Be careful, though, not to overdo it. It's even more distracting if you have to go to the bathroom and there's a while to go before a break.

6. Have exactly the same amount of caffeine as you do every other day. Our bodies are very sensitive to caffeine. If you never have any, don't have any tomorrow. If you usually have a cup of coffee or two, have the same amount tomorrow. If you have more than usual, you'll feel jittery. If you have less, you'll feel tired and eventually get a headache.
7. If you feel anxious at any time, take a moment to relax and reset yourself. You might be tempted to push ahead even harder, but that will only make you more stressed. You have to take a moment off. You might quickly remember a time you were confident in the past, or the reasons why you worked so hard to prepare for the test. You might shift your body into a confident position. You might think of someone who loves you or whom you love. You might think of something funny (that one always works great for me). You might think of your favorite upbeat song. You might take a few deep breaths. Just a few seconds are all you need, 30 seconds tops, and you'll be ready to go.

### **Want More?**

These tips will really help you raise your score, as long as you follow them and practice before you take the test.

Sometimes when you want to improve your SAT score as much as you possibly can, especially when you don't have a lot of time to prepare, you need more than just tips.

If you want a step by step, detailed study plan and detailed help with how to make these tips work for you, check out my [SAT Quick Fix Study Guide](#).

Good luck!