

Dispelling the Myths about the SAT and College Admissions MYTH: The SAT is a test of intelligence and my scores are a good indication of how I will do in college.

FACT: While SAT scores definitely matter, they do NOT test your intelligence, nor do they represent how well you will do in college. The scores you achieve on your SATs reflect only how prepared you were to take that particular exam and how good a test taker you are. The weight that admissions committees place on your SAT scores in relation to the other factors (e.g., GPA, letters of recommendation, extracurricular activities, volunteer work, etc.) will vary from school to school, but nevertheless, SATs are a necessary part of your application package.

MYTH: The SAT tests complex math concepts.

FACT: SAT math is tough because of the way the concepts are tested, not because of the concepts themselves. The SAT includes math concepts you learned in the seventh or eighth grade, i.e. arithmetic, basic geometry, basic algebra, and algebra II. You won't see any calculus or trigonometry on the SAT.

MYTH: There are lots of skills you can learn to help you improve your math score, but you can't really improve your Critical Reading score.

FACT: The single best way to improve your Critical Reading score is to improve your vocabulary. Reading comprehension and sentence completions all rely upon your understanding of the words in the questions and answer choices. If you know what the words mean, you will be better equipped to answer the questions quickly and accurately. So read books, newspapers, and anything else you can get your hands on; reading broadly and frequently will help you build your vocabulary substantially.

MYTH: If you don't know the answer, it's better to leave a question blank than to guess.

FACT: Not necessarily. You may already know how SAT scoring works: you receive one point for every correct answer, zero points for every question you leave unanswered, and minus one-quarter of a point for every question you answer incorrectly. A lot of people think of that quarter point off for wrong answers as a "guessing penalty." They figure that it will hurt their score to guess, because they may end up losing points. They're wrong. They don't understand that the SAT is a test of courage. Any time you can eliminate at least one of the answer choices as being definitely wrong, it's better to guess. From a purely statistical standpoint, this approach will gain you more points over the whole test than you'll get by playing it "safe" and leaving the questions blank.

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