



Standardized Test Taking Strategies

First you need to decide which test you are taking, the SAT or ACT. While colleges value the two tests equally, some students are better at one than the other. Since all students need to take the PSAT anyway, you can use that to gauge how well you will do on the SAT, or if you should attempt the ACT instead.

PRO TIP

The questions on the SAT tend to become harder as the section progresses, while the difficulty of questions on the ACT is more randomized. Leaving the hardest questions until the end ensures you won't run out of time to answer the easier questions.

IMPORTANT NOTE

If you are on free or reduced lunch, you should talk with your counselor about getting fee waivers for standardized tests. Both the SAT and ACT offer fee waivers for students.

Preparation



The best way to prepare for a standardized test is to take practice versions of that test. While doing practice problems in isolation can be helpful to master challenging concepts, the length and structure of the SAT and ACT are very different from normal academic tests, and this is often what trips students up.

When you take a practice test, try to make the experience as close to the real thing as you can manage. Do it all in one sitting, time yourself, and don't use resources that you won't have on the real test.

Once you've finished a test, grade yourself using an answer guide. For each question you missed, figure out the correct answer, and figure out why you got it wrong. This may take a while, that's ok. By determining what went wrong, you can focus your studying, to make the best use of your time



You should also work on making better use of time when answering questions. If you get stuck on a math question, and can't figure out how to start working towards the correct answer within 30 seconds, move on to another question. While you will likely figure out the answer by spending more time, that same time could be used to answer several other questions correctly, gaining you more points overall.