

General Test-Taking Tips and Strategies

The SAT and ACT are different from other tests you've taken, even other multiple-choice tests. It's invaluable to walk into the testing center feeling comfortable and positive to give yourself the best chance of doing well. We've put together some tips to help you in the days leading up to the test as well as for the big day itself!

Pre-Test & Test Day Tips

Here are some tips from students just like you for the days (and morning) leading up to the test:

- **Scout out your test site, especially if it's unfamiliar.** Print out directions if necessary.
- **Get a good night sleep.** This doesn't mean going to bed crazy early; just don't stay up until the wee hours. You'll want to be well rested.
- **Get all your stuff ready before you go to bed.** You don't want to be scrambling around for things in the morning. Lay out your clothes the night before (see below) and gather your test registration ticket, photo ID, several sharpened No. 2 pencils (no mechanical pencils allowed), erasers and calculator. Make sure it has batteries!
- **Wear comfortable clothes and dress in layers.** Test sites use the cafeteria, auditorium, or other spaces that are large enough to hold all of the test-takers, but schools often turn off the heat or air conditioning on the weekends. It is difficult to concentrate when you are too hot or too cold.
- **Bring a watch.** Basic time management is up to you! The proctors tell you how much time you have for each section, when to start, when to stop, and when you have 5 minutes left, but it's up to you to pace yourself and make sure you don't run out of time.
- **Bring a calculator *that you know how to use!*** A graphing calculator can help save a lot of time converting decimals to fractions and vice versa, manipulating square roots and more, but if you aren't comfortable using it it may do more harm than good. Practice!
- **Wake up early enough to avoid a morning rush.** You don't want to be rushing into the test center at the last minute (and you *definitely* don't want to be late as you may be locked out!), nor do you want to be wiping the sleep out of your eyes when the proctor tells you to open your test booklet. You want to be mentally awake and alert.
- **Eat breakfast. Pack a snack & drink for breaks.** You don't have to pack away a five-course meal, but eat something healthy and substantial enough to provide lasting energy over the next several hours. Don't overdo the coffee or anything else that might cause additional anxiety or sugar-crash mid-test.
- **Arrive on time (or early!) to the test center.** Late arrivals are not permitted.
- **Relax.** Assuming you've prepared, you've got this. Don't let all the SAT-hype throw you off your game.
- **Post-test, do something fun.** Don't sit around and revisit the test for hours after you've left the test center. While it may be helpful to jot down a few notes on things on which you think you may have under-performed, don't overdo it. Take the afternoon off and do something fun with friends or family.

Specific Test-Taking Strategies

We'll provide you with specific strategies for different question types within each skills review section, but there are some general strategies to employ on the ACT and SAT. We've outlined them below.

- **Manage your nerves.** If you find your anxiety levels rising at any point during the test, close your eyes for ten seconds and take a deep breath. It will be ten seconds well-spent and help you regain your calm and focus.

- **Reset after each section.** Once a section is over, it's gone. Don't let what you think may have been a poor performance on one section affect future sections. Just take them one at a time.
- **Use process of elimination and guess.** Assuming you can eliminate just one answer on a question, it's to your advantage to guess. If you can eliminate more than one, even better. Just pick a letter and move on. If you aren't able to eliminate any choice and aren't comfortable guessing, just skip it and return to the problem later if time permits. Don't spend too much time on any one question as no question is worth more than another. We'll talk more about guessing and process of elimination (POE) later on. If you do skip, just remember to skip the question on the answer sheet as well.
- **Don't let yourself get distracted.** Often, reading passages will include lots of difficult terminology or weird names and math questions can be super wordy. Don't let that overwhelm and distract you. Take them one step at a time and translate the difficult or weird terminology/words into simpler versions that are less distracting.
- **Write on the test.** Underline important material, circle key points and make notes that might help you.