

My SAT Experience (1/21/2017)

The night before I was to take the SAT with Simi, my initial plan was to stay home, relax with Anya and get to bed early. Earlier in the day I was at my parents' house so that I could see my uncle and aunt before they left. They mentioned that they were going to dinner to Anurada's house and I thought it would be nice for me to go with Anya, since Simi and Anita were going to Wicked. I'm glad I went as it was nice to see some of my parents' friends and I got to say bye to my uncle and aunt who had come to the end of their 4 month stay in the United States. Unfortunately, my plans of not having an alcoholic drink and coming home early were foiled. When asked what I wanted to drink, I responded with, "Coke." I was then told that there was wine and I said that I was fine. After saying no a second time, someone else came into the room I was in with a class of wine, looking to give it away. At this point I just decided it would be easier for me to take the wine than try to explain why I didn't want it. I imagined explaining to them that I was taking the SAT the next morning so I could experience what it felt like again in the hopes that I could help Simi when she later took it "for real" seemed weird at best. Once I had one glass, I figured I'd already failed at my goal so naturally, I ended up taking a second! As usual, dinner wasn't served till reasonably late and once we finished, it took me time to choreale Anya. Just as I convinced her it was time to go, I found out I'd have to wait for sweets. By the time I ate the sweets, choraed Anya again and said my goodbyes, it was past 10:30.

At home, I still had to get Anya to bed and my hope was to do so before Simi and Anita came home. Yet, between Anya wanting to play for a few minutes and all of her shenanigans, as well as a few dishes I still had to do, Simi and Anita made it back before I was able to get to bed. With them home, it was at least another 20 minutes before I made it to bed, so I ultimately ended up getting to sleep around 11:50 pm and set my alarm for 6:00 am for my morning run.

I ran as scheduled because I thought it would be best to get my brain flowing and thought it would be best not to deviate from my typical routine. Though this isn't for everyone, I think it may help some students. The run went smoothly and I came back inside to wake up Simi. We both ate breakfast and made it out of the door with our checklist of things - registration ticket, ID, pencils, calculator, snacks, and coffee (just for me).

My advice

1. Do not plan anything the night before that ends after 8 pm. It's best to relax and home and ensure a good night's rest.
2. Exercise early in the morning isn't for everyone, but it probably has a very mild positive effect. (Simi should skip this.)
3. A good breakfast is very important. The test is long and there are limited breaks for snacking. You shouldn't stuff yourself for breakfast, but it still needs to be reasonably substantial. That happy medium is key. For me, I've always found that a breakfast with some protein (egg, sausage), is best.
4. Prep your materials at least one day in advance. I had to go out and buy #2 pencils at 10:45 pm the night before. It seems as if this could be avoided. In the rush in the morning, it would be easy to forget something, like your admission ticket. Also, make sure your calculator is an approved calculator at least 24 hours in advance, so if it isn't, you can go buy one.
5. In addition to the required items: admission ticket, pencils, ID and calculator, make sure to bring snacks and water. These will have to be placed outside of the room but you do get two breaks and I am sure most would be very hungry well before the end of the test if they didn't eat during the two given breaks.
6. While many brought their cell phones with them into the testing center and were allowed to have them on the table with the snacks outside of the room, my advice is to leave the cell phone in the car. I ended up doing this and it was partially bad as I had no chance to get my phone till 1 pm and it would have been good for me to communicate with Anita before then. (Yes, if you leave something in the car, YOU WILL NOT be able to get it during either of the two breaks!!! The breaks are quite short and your car may be far from where your testing room is.) After I reflected on my experience, I decided that not having the phone was better for testing. Since I very literally only had the required items and my snacks, there was very little extra thoughts distracting my brain. Basically, by leaving the phone behind, you are reserving 5 hours (4 if you aren't taking the essay) for the test and nothing else. You can't talk to anyone and text in between sections, so it's easier in my opinion to stay absolutely focused on the test since you know that you can't communicate with anyone.
7. For me I think it was beneficial not to know anyone in my test room. Again, it helped me stay completely focused on the test and didn't add anything into my thoughts. I think if you are thinking about a lot of things, there's less room for you to solve the problems/questions, due to their being a fixed cognitive load each of us can handle. Anything you can do to remove outside thoughts and distractions, is good I think. For a regular kid though, this particular step is hard to do. Most kids sign up for the SAT with their friends and it's probably best to take the test at a familiar location (their school) than an unfamiliar one.
8. Before the test, you have to fill out a fairly detailed answer sheet. While this part seems trivial, my proctor slightly messed up his initial explanation for doing so. This information has to be

filled out properly, so my advice is this: don't skip ahead in filling ANYTHING out, prep in advance for what's going to be where to fill out on this sheet so you know what to expect, if you think the proctor has made a mistake in an explanation, don't follow the direction, wait 2 minutes to see if he corrects himself, and then if he hasn't yet, speak up. When I was young, I'd always speed ahead of the class when filling out this stuff, but I think that is bad. When you do that, you have to (a) interpret the sheet on your own without their directions, and simultaneously, (b) listen to the proctor to see where they are. I am pretty sure trying to do both of these things together increases the chance of error. So, it's best to be prepared - know what's coming with this section and just follow the proctor exactly at their pace.

9. The time limits are a big deal! Here is how much time I had to spare in each section:

Reading Passages - 2 minutes (65 minute time limit)

BREAK

Language Usage - 12 seconds (35 minute time limit)

Math No Calc - 5 minutes (25 minute time limit)

BREAK

Math Calc - 17 minutes (55 minute time limit)

Essay - 2 1/2 minutes (50 minute time limit)

For both math sections, I was able to take one sweep through all my answers and double check critical steps of my work. I decided to retype in everything into the calculator for the last section (just to make sure I didn't make any typos the first time around). I work faster than most in math, so I don't think most students will have enough time do fully double check their answers.

For BOTH English sections, it's important to practice with access to time, knowing how much time you have per section. I think it's best to force yourself to stay a little bit ahead of the pace until the last two passages, at the very least. It would be terrible to not be able to fully read a passage and take the necessary time to answer questions. Here is how much time you have per passage. In our testing room, a timer was easily available for me to glance at so I forced myself to adhere to these time limits:

Reading = $65 \text{ min} / 5 \text{ passages} = 13 \text{ min/passage}$

Language = $35 \text{ min} / 4 \text{ passages} = 8 \text{ min/passage}$ (I have rounded down here so that the last passage doesn't get short changed).

10. Probably the most important thing is dealing with questions you either (a) get stuck on, or (b) aren't sure what the answer is. It's important to set a strict time limit for moving onto the next question. There is a careful balance to strike here. If you decide to go in order and not give up, the problem is that you might not get to the last questions. If you do give up a bunch, then you have to bounce back and forth between several unanswered questions at the end. This type of frequent context switching is bad in a testing environment. Since each passage is different from the others, context switching on the English sections is much more costly than the math (where each question is generally independent of each other question and a single question has very few necessary items to remember at one time). For me, I think 90 seconds was my time limit. Obviously, I didn't look at the clock before and after every question. I just "knew" when I got

stuck on something and did it by feel. For the reading passages, the questions are generally related, so I either answered all the questions for a passage, or left a few for a passage blank to return to. But, I decided that it would be really bad to go back to all the passages after my initial sweep, so before I left a passage to start a new one I checked to see if I was on pace, ahead or behind. If I was ahead, I gave myself some more time to try to resolve my issues with the unanswered questions. If not, I quickly marked in my test book (not the answer sheet) my most likely answers so that if time were to get low, I could at least bubble those in. I believe a good goal for any student on the English sections is to leave no more than 2 passages that aren't fully answered after your first sweep through. On the math, it's hard for me to say as generally, since I am able to do the math questions. But, I'd probably say that you don't want to leave more than about 4 blank on the no calculator and no more than 6 blank on the calculator math sections upon your first pass. For me, there was one math question I got stuck on. I realized it and gave up on that question in 90 seconds. Doing so was key. When I got back to that question with 7 minutes left on the section, I reread the question and realized that there was a key piece of given information I wasn't using. Without that piece of information, the question was impossible to solve. So, somehow, in the heat of the testing moment, on my initial read through of the question, I missed some critical information in the question. This can happen to anyone I think and leaving the question and coming back to it made it easier for me to discover this piece of given information.

11. Make sure to have in your head a consistent bubbling strategy so that when you leave a question blank, you don't bubble the answer to the following question in the wrong place. Here is my recommendation for bubbling strategy:

For English, write your answers in the answer booklet first for a whole passage. Only bubble when you have decided that you will be moving onto the next passage. The reason for this strategy is that the answers for different questions for the same passage are related. If you change your answer to one question, you may very well change your answer for another question. (This is particularly true of the question pairs where they ask some question and then ask you for the lines in the text that provide the best evidence for your answer to the previous question.) So, it's best only to bubble once you really feel like you have a hold on a passage and have basically completed it or have decided that you aren't sure about a few things but need to move on. For me, there were three instances where I "changed" my overall view of a passage and that changed the answer to at least two questions. Carefully copy the answers from the answer booklet to the scantron double checking the question number EVERY time.

For math, it's probably best to write your answer in the answer booklet for a question and then bubble it right away.

On either section, if you are towards the end and pressed for time, skip the step of writing the answer in the answer booklet and just bubble your answer selection immediately after you've made it. (I had to do this on the section where I had only 12 seconds left after I made my last bubble.)

12. Reading passages advice

- a. Read the whole passage without reading the questions that you'll answer about it. This is often contrary to the advice you get. I think it's important to get the gist/flow of the whole piece without your mind being cluttered with specific items to look for. Sometimes, if you feel that you don't "get it", the beauty is that sometimes the information in the answer choices can help shed some light onto what's really going on in the passage.
- b. On the questions in pairs, if you are very confident of the answer to the first choice, there's no need to read the choices for the follow up question (which asks for textual evidence of your answer to the previous question.) But...if you aren't very confident, read through each of the portions of the passage that are choices for the follow up question, keep those four in working memory, and then go back to reading what the question is asking.
- c. Be wary of making leaps that aren't directly supported by the text. Often times, there are "attractive" choices because they make sense to us generally, but they are directly contradicted in the text. Any choice that you see directly contradicted in the text should be eliminated.
- d. Several of these passages have questions relating to graphs. Be very, very careful to read each label on the graph. Given choices about what a graph shows, be careful about the units. Also, I found that several times the correct answer was something that sounded vague but was 100% verifiable based on the data shown, things like, "Candidate 2 earned greater than 50% of the online vote." The wrong choices would be more specific but have at least one item not verifiable by the data.

13. Language usage advice

Here are the sorts of rules/style issues I determined that they check:

- a. Subject/Verb agreement - any time the underlined section has a verb, pay very careful attention to the subject. Enough said.
- b. Avoid redundancy - you can often eliminate a choice because it includes information that is redundant, something like, "Their annual sales were 4 million dollars per year." The word "annual" already conveys the idea "per year". So, either, one would say, "Their sales were 4 million per year," or "Their annual sales were 4 million dollars.".
- c. The correct choice is often the shortest choice that is grammatically correct. Pay particular attention to the shortest choice. Carefully plug it into the underlined area to see if it makes sense or not. If it does, it's likely to be the correct answer.

14. Math advice

I don't see the math sections (no calculator or calculator) as significantly different. At the end of the day, you need to be able to do some simple arithmetic on paper (addition, subtraction,

multiplication, division of integers, rational numbers and decimals.) If you are bad at this, practice it. It's not too hard. You just need enough repetition that all of the two digit computations are second nature. This doesn't take as long as you think it might. If you are poor at this, I promise you the time spent to get better at it is well worth it. But mostly, here is what I saw with the math section:

a. You should understand the idea of a linear relationship inside out. This concept, which, requires memorizing two things, is tested many times in the math section. All linear functions can be expressed in a form similar to $y = mx + b$. b represents the initial value and m represents the change per unit of x . For example, if our cookie jar starts with 5 cookies and each week we add 2 cookies to it, then $y = 2x + 5$ represents the number of cookies in the jar after x weeks.

b. Quadratics are big. Learn them. Learn to factor them and realize that the factored form gives you the roots. Learn to use the discriminant to determine the number of real roots.

c. Always plug in your solved answers back into your original equation to see if any of the roots are extraneous. I am pretty sure EVERY exam has at least one question with one extraneous root.

d. If you are stuck solving an equation, just plug in their answer choices and see if they work. This takes some extra time, but will often times yield you the correct answer when you wouldn't have gotten the question otherwise. If plugging in looks computationally intensive, delay this step until after you've made one pass through all of the questions.

e. Every math section I saw asked the student to solve for some ratio, say $\frac{x}{y}$ given some information. In these questions, it's impossible to solve for x and impossible to solve for y , but not so difficult to solve for the given fraction. Just take one of their given equations and use cross-multiplication (only if it's valid) to get one side to equal the fraction $\frac{x}{y}$. From there, the answer usually presents itself.