

# Top 20 SAT Tips to Earn a 1400+ SAT Score

Over 7 years of SAT tutoring and teaching, I've taught these 20 strategies (and more) to over 1,000 students, improving SAT scores over 100 points on average.

If you want to see the actual improvement, you need to practice, see your mistakes, and learn from them.

The best way to do this is to [start a 14-day free trial in our SAT Prep program](#), and watch your score rise.

**For questions about our SAT Prep program or interest in private tutoring / college guidance please email Ivan Harjehausen: [ivan@next-step-education.com](mailto:ivan@next-step-education.com) or call / text 864-553-6645.**

## ✦ Mindset & Habits for Studying

### 1. Learn the Question Types and Rules

The SAT has a predictable set of skills tested—grammar rules, algebra concepts, reading logic. If you learn the skills and strategies, you'll know how to answer quickly and accurately. Treat it like a game: learn the rules, win more often.

Easiest Skills to Improve Your Score Quickly if you're currently in the 900-1300 range:

- Punctuation rules (semicolon, colon, and comma usage)
- Setting and solving Systems of Equations (substitution & elimination) for Linear Word Problems
- Synthesizing Notes – explicitly follow the keywords in the objective “the student wants to...”

If you're shooting for 1300+, you need to learn the rarer skills and eliminate mistakes. Read on, take our program's diagnostic test, and study the skills that challenge you.

### 2. Use Breathing to Relax & Stay Focused

When you want to focus and get calm on the test (or in life!), do 3 [Physiological Sigh](#) Breaths:

- Breathe in deep through your nose
- Breathe in a second time, even deeper
- Hold for a few seconds
- Release

Additionally, do stretches during your breaks to stay alert and get blood flowing. Calm body = calm mind.

### 3. Practice in Short Bursts, Anytime

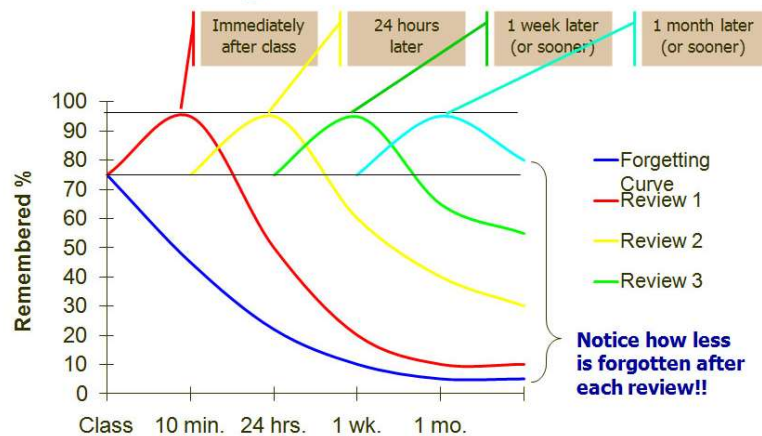
Five minutes on your phone > nothing. Cramming doesn't work, but consistency does.

In my experience with students and personally learning, if I go more than 3-4 days without reviewing something new, I tend to forget it. So try to practice at least 2-3 times a week, even in short doses.

Ask yourself questions like, "What did I learn last time?", "What was that grammar rule again?"

**The Forgetting Curve:** This describes how the brain tends to forget things very quickly if they are never deeply learned the first time and aren't reviewed. When you forget something or aren't good at it, it just means haven't reviewed and practiced enough.

## Overcoming the Curve



### 4. Build Endurance with Full-Length Tests

Start with short sessions, but do our two full tests before the exam approaches. SAT performance is mental marathon. Don't wait until test day to run 2 hours straight.

## Reading Strategies

### 5. When You're Stuck Between Two Choices, Don't Argue Which is Right → Argue Which One is Wrong

Why? Because it's easy to stretch logic to make both seem right. But the correct answer will hold up under scrutiny. The wrong one will always have a key word or phrase that is a weakness. (**see Strategy #8 for those keywords**).

## 6. Be Interested in the Passages (Even Ironically)

Pretend you're into the passage, even sarcastically. Tell yourself, "OOOOH WOWWW I love reading urban planning studies and analyzing archaic Jane Austen passages – WHAT COULD IT BE ABOUT?"

You'll stay focused longer and retain more. Managing attention is a skill. Use it.

## 7. Rephrase Difficult Sentences

**When passages get dense, reword them like you're explaining to a 5-year-old, focusing on the basics:**

- Continually simplify and rephrase with every few words in a phrase –
- Ask yourself, "What's the subject (of the sentence), and what's happening to the subject / what's the subject doing?"
- Focus on key words and phrases, and ignore words you don't know (i.e. "labile")
- Feel free to use slang and connect to real life examples in your own life.

For example, try this first sentence yourself, then see a simple version below:

"Molecular, cellular, and systems-level processes convert initial, labile memory representations into more permanent ones, available for continued reactivation and recall over extended periods of time."

- ➔ Simple version: "Molecules and cells have processes that make initial memories permanent. The permanent memories are then available to keep remembering for a loooooong time." ➔ (My internal thoughts "Oh, it's like when I knew I remembered something last night but I guess it was a short-term initial memory because I don't remember this morning.")

## 8. Use Keywords to Eliminate Choices, Especially Overly Specific or Too-General Answers

Some wrong answers fail because they **are too specific, generalize too broadly, are off-topic, or are too extreme** (always, never, -est). Learn to spot the common errors, identifying specific words and phrases.

Passage: "Many coastal cities are investing in levies, seawalls, and other infrastructure to combat the effects of rising sea levels caused by climate change."

Question: "Which choice best summarizes the main idea of the sentence?"

A) Many coastal cities are focusing on the best solution to stopping flooding: building seawalls made of concrete and steel. ← Overly specific & too extreme (it's just one solution, not necessarily the best)

B) Some cities have flooding problems. ← Overly general

C) Coastal cities are taking steps to address rising sea levels. ←  Best answer


D) Climate change is a controversial topic debated by scientists and politicians that may displace populations and incur massive financial damage. ← Off-topic

### 9. Break Answer Choices into Parts to Identify Flawed Reasoning

If an answer is half right but has flawed reasoning, it's wrong. Evidence matters. Break apart choices that sound good at first.

**Passage:** Although the company initially struggled, its focus on innovation eventually led to widespread success.

**Question:** What does the sentence mainly show about the company?

- A)** It succeeded because it avoided innovation. ← While it did succeed (partially correct), it gives *incorrect reasoning*.
- B)** It failed due to poor leadership and market instability. ← *Half right (initial struggle)*, but false because — nothing mentioned about leadership or market.
- C)** It turned its early struggles into success by prioritizing innovation. ←  *Fully supported by the text*.
- D)** Innovation always leads to success in the business world. ← *Overgeneralization* — sentence only refers to this company.

## Grammar & Writing Rules

### 10. When in Doubt, Go Short

If multiple answers seem reasonably grammatically correct, the shortest one is usually best. Clarity and concision win.

### 11. Know Independent vs Dependent Clauses

This is the foundation for punctuation. Semicolons, commas, colons – all depend on clause structure. Master this and everything else falls into place.

- Semicolons connect two independent clauses, usually with a similar theme.
  - o I went to the store; it was closed.
- Colons always have an independent clause before the colon, then they have a list, explanation, or example afterward.
  - o There are important things which you must know about me: I raise cattle, I eat 10 bananas every single day, and I

**Key strategy: Identify the core subject and the predicate**

Independent Clause: there is a subject (the who/what) and a predicate (what the subject is doing). It could be its own independent sentence.

Ex: John (subject) went to the store (predicate).

Dependent Clause: this cannot be its own independent sentence.

- These phrases often begin with Transition Words (Because, while, despite, etc.) or “-ing” words, also known as a Gerund phrase.
- When in doubt: If you read them aloud in your head and you feel like you’re waiting for the next part, it’s a dependent clause.

Ex: While John was at the store, ... (something should come next)

## 12. Punctuation Rules to Practice

- Semicolon: Two independent clauses
- Comma: Intro phrases, non-essential clauses, modifiers
- Colon: Independent clause before, then a list/explanation

In short...

- Semicolons:
  - o Join two independent clauses (i.e. have subject and predicate and could be their own sentence):
    - My neighbor has 2 pet purple kangaroos who jump on their trampoline; yesterday, I joined them and tried to jump higher.
- Commas:
  - o Separate introductory phrases and descriptive dependent clauses from the main sentence:
    - “Drawing a record-breaking 108 million global viewers, the Mike Tyson vs. Jake Paul boxing match in November 2024, despite some critics’ views that it was unfair since Mike Tyson is 31 years older than Jake Paul.”
      - The last part is a dependent clause because grammatically, it essentially is just “despite some critics’ views.” Any phrase that follows “that”, “which”, “of”, “for”, “since” or “because” is just part of a prepositional phrase – don’t get tripped up!
  - o Make lists:
    - “I bought cookies, pizza, and soda from the store.”
  - o Use before FANBOYS conjunctions to combine two independent clauses (FANBOYS – for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so):
    - “Despite trying to save money, I knew my girlfriend desperately wanted to see Taylor Swift, so I spent my life savings on seeing the Eras tour.
  - o Non-essential clauses – provide additional, optional information, separated by commas. If you omitted this part, the rest of the sentence should work perfectly fine.

- “My great grand-daddy, a legendary bear wrestler from Alaska, got into a fist-fight with Winnie the Pooh!
- Colon:
  - Independent clause before, then a list, explanation, or definition afterward
    - “After a piano falling from the sky nearly killed, I did what any rational person would do: I ran away screaming and then ordered pizza.
    - “There are three artists on Spotify who outshine everyone else in terms of all-time streams: Taylor Swift (106 billion streams), Bad Bunny, (91.6 billion streams), and Drake (89 billion streams).”
      - Note: a common mistake is not having a complete first sentence. Here’s an incorrect example:
        - Spotify’s top three artists are: Taylor Swift, Bad Bunny, and Drake.

### 13. Synthesizing Notes

These questions always say “The student wants to \_\_\_\_\_”. This is the first thing you should read, and you should identify the key phrases that are “must haves”. Here are examples from our practice program: The student wants to...

- emphasize the duration and purpose of Cohen’s and Rodrigues’s work.
- emphasize the aim of the research study
- compare the two women's contributions to the March on Washington.

### 14. Parallel Structure Matters

Keep lists consistent: -ing, -ing, -ing, or to [verb], to [verb], and to [verb]. If a sentence starts one way, the rest should follow.

For example, “I like to hike, to play piano, and to work out.”

Incorrect example: “I like hiking, to play piano, and working out.” – it sounds awkward!

## += Math Strategies

### 15. Master High-Frequency Concepts, then the Niche Skills

Master Linear Equations, factoring Quadratic Equations, Geometry rules (especially triangles, area / volume, and angles), Polynomial Expressions, and transforming Word Problems into algebraic Systems of Equations to get to a 600 on Math.

If you want a 700+, you need to learn the rarer skills and everything else at Hard difficulty: Trigonometry, Circle Equations, Probability, and Exponential Equations.

If you want a 750+, you need to learn how to not make mistakes – how to check yourself and build your mental endurance through volume of practice.

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<https://www.next-step-education.com/get-started>

### 16. Work Backwards When You're Stuck

Plug answer choices into the question to see which one works. Sometimes that's faster than solving forward.

**Problem:** What value of  $x$  satisfies the equation?

$$2^{x+1} = 8x$$

- A) 1
- B) 2
- C) 3
- D) 4

In this case you'd need to do logarithms, but you can just plug 'em in here – did you solve it?

### 17. Plug in Easy Numbers (0, 1, or 2)

Plug answer choices into the question to see which one works. Sometimes that's faster than solving forward.

**Problem:** A square has side length  $x$ . A new square is created with side length twice as long. By what factor does the **area** increase?

- A) 2
- B) 3
- C) 4
- D) 8

👉 Plug in  $x = 1$  for the first square, then  $x = 2$  for the new square.

Area 1<sup>st</sup> square = length \* width =  $1 * 1 = 1$

Area 2<sup>nd</sup> square = length \* width =  $2 * 2 = 4$

When the side length doubled from 1 to 2, the area increased \* 4, so the answer is C.

### 18. Know What the Question is Asking

Always pause and clarify what they want: ' $x + 2$ ,' 'number of apples,' 'percent change.'  
You can do 95% of a problem right and still miss it by misreading.

### 19. Decode Graphs and Tables Before Answering

Spend 15 seconds reading the title, axes, units. Ask yourself: 'What's going on here?' You'll save time and avoid mistakes.

### 20. Review Key Algebra Rules

Brush up on distribution, exponent rules, radicals, and simplifying expressions. They form the backbone of many questions.

Congratulations for finishing reading this! We want to see you succeed in college and beyond, so for your next step...

**Sign up for a 14-day Free Trial to master all SAT skills!**

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