



## **SAT and ACT Myth Busting**

Source: [Academic Approach](#)

### **Myth 1 - Standardized tests have nothing to do with real education.**

If you subscribe to this myth, you risk losing a valuable educational opportunity. What academic skills are covered by the standardized tests?

- The ACT and SAT each have a timed essay. Students score well if they know how to develop a thesis, structure information, and apply some basic rhetorical strategies to persuade an audience. This form of timed essay writing will be assessed throughout college, so students should master it early on.
- The ACT and SAT each have grammar sections. In a world where instant-messaging and text-messaging dominate communication, students only benefit from learning how to write coherent sentences and use the Queen's English. Proper grammar matters: students will be judged by their command of language throughout their lives. There's good reason to take this test component seriously and raise scores while developing critical communication skills.
- The ACT and SAT each have reading sections. How many students know their word-per-minute reading speed? Few do. A thorough reading assessment and course of training not only raises test scores but also enhances reading efficiency. Addressing bad habits and developing good ones can save hours of homework time.
- The ACT and SAT each have math sections. If a student displays math deficits on the test, these deficits are likely mirrored in his/her high school math class. In preparing wisely, a student can enhance vital math skills both on the test and in the classroom.

### **Myth 2 - "My children go to an excellent school, so their school's curriculum must be preparing them thoroughly for the SAT and ACT."**

The very best schools' curricula often do not correlate perfectly to standardized test content. Some material on the standardized tests was either taught several years prior to the test's administration or never taught at all in a systematic way. Students are struck at how concepts they learned in 8<sup>th</sup> grade reappear suddenly on a test they take in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Parents and students are even more surprised to see that certain reasoning concepts such as *non sequiturs* or grammar concepts such as misplaced modifiers and coordinating conjunctions are often never dealt with directly in their school's curriculum. Therefore, a review of and supplement to the child's high school work are necessary in most cases.

### **Myth 3 - "When in doubt, pick C!" and other pieces of bad advice.**

Taking a trivial approach to testing gets you a trivial result -- in terms of both score improvement and educational impact. Here are some specific and all too common bits of erroneous advice:

- Crimes Against Composition: *"It doesn't matter what you write your essay about. It just matters that it sounds good and that you fill your test book."*

There's nothing worse than telling a young writer to divorce style from substance. The graders of standardized test essays are predominantly seasoned educators; as a result, the students who score the highest scores write on real academic topics (e.g., history, literature, etc.) and use an appropriate, academic tone and style.

- Grammar Gaffes: *"If it sounds right, it is right."*

In this day and age of instant messaging and text messaging, students often rely on, let's say, *relaxed* standards of English grammar. What sounds right to the ear may in fact be wrong grammatically. For example, most students would agree that "If I was him" sounds better than "If I were he," but the former is wrong and the latter is correct.

- Mathematical Misnomers: *"Just plug in the answers and use your calculator."*

Gaming the test can actually waste time, making the student inefficient and less successful. There is no substitute for memorizing the relevant formulae and rules that appear recurrently on the SAT and ACT.

- Reductive Readings: *"Reading the passage doesn't matter; just test the answers."*

This bit of advice is not only anti-intellectual but also ineffective. Many reading questions assess the student's grasp of the author's main point and tone. Without learning how to discern a passage's main meaning, students will not answer certain questions correctly, no matter how they analyze the answer choices.

### **How does one avoid getting caught up in these myths?**

1. Have your student take a full-length, timed practice SAT or ACT
2. Assess the gaps in the student's performance with responsible educators
3. Spot-treat those gaps and complete the student's knowledge of vital curricula

At the end of the day, a successful and effective test preparation process is built around education, not gaming and short cuts.