

# Cracking the code

Why students should study for the SAT and ACT

By Anne Chaconas

Although almost every student is told to take the SAT or ACT, they aren't often told to study for them. Oftentimes the thought is, "Why should they study if they're already doing well in school?" The reality is that many students are not fine when it comes to the SAT or the ACT, even if they're doing well in school. So why should students study for the SAT and ACT?

## The two tests are extremely coachable.

The SAT and ACT are standardized tests, and scores from an earlier administration (even one from years ago) can easily be compared to current scores. What does this mean? It means that both the SAT and ACT are formulaic and test concepts in the same ways. Although you won't see the same questions used over and over, you will see the same approaches to questions. It is this repetition that allows the tests to be so easily coachable. When you know what to expect and how the SAT or ACT present concepts, you are more likely to understand the question being asked and, as a result, more likely to pick the correct answer.

## It can help temper test anxiety.

Familiarity can lead to a greater sense of calm and control for students when it comes to the SAT and ACT. Much of what lies at the root of test anxiety is fear of the unknown. When a student takes an SAT or ACT prep course, or studies on their own with books, it gives them a knowledge base of what to expect. This can help alleviate fears and instill a sense of confidence when test day arrives.

## An initial bad score can undermine future ones.

Although most students end up taking standardized tests more than once, a bad score on the first test can erode their belief in their own skills. Prepping for the exams before they take it for the first time will likely result in a good initial score, and may even result in the student only having to take the test once.

## Standardized test scores can make or break an application.

College admissions are extremely competitive. Colleges are looking for anything that will set a student apart. For students with otherwise perfect profiles, a close-to-perfect standardized test score might seal the deal or give the student an extremely good shot at acceptance. For students with average applications, a great test score can be that boost they need to stand out from the crowd. On the other hand, a low test score can put a blemish on an otherwise stellar application, or might keep a student from standing out entirely.

Prepping for the SAT and ACT doesn't have to be hard or expensive — in fact, students using books to self-prepare might spend less than \$50. The importance of prepping cannot be overstated; taking the time to crack the code of standardized tests can yield huge rewards for college applicants.

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