Harold's SAT Prep
Cheat Sheet
21 January 2026

Formerly the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)

Exam Dates

Exam	Year in High School	Why
PSAT Exam	PSAT 8/9: Freshman year (9th grade)	Optional early practice
	PSAT 10: Sophomore year (10th grade)	Practice run
	PSAT/NMSQT: October of Junior year (11th grade)	October exam counts for National Merit Scholar eligibility (NMSQT)
SAT Exam	Spring of Junior year (11th grade)	Ideal first attempt Aligns with Algebra 2 completion Gives time for retakes
	August between Junior and Senior year	Popular for students who prep over the summer
	Fall of Senior year (12th grade)	Great for score improvement before early action (Nov 1)

Exam	2026 Dates
PSAT Exam Dates	1-Oct-26
SAT Exam Dates	14-Mar-26 2-May-26 6-Jun-26 15-Aug-26 12-Sep-26 3-Oct-26 7-Nov-26 5-Dec-26
ACT Exam Dates	14-Feb-26 11-Apr-26 13-Jun-26 11-Jul-26 19-Sep-26 17-Oct-26 12-Dec-26

SAT Scores

Section	Score Range
R&W Section	200 – 800
Math Section	200 – 800
Total Score	400 - 1600
Scores are typically available 2–4 weeks after test day.	

College Admission

School		Average Score of Enrolled Students	Level	State
Caltech	California Institute of Technology	1555	1. Ivy Level	CA
JHU	Johns Hopkins University	1555		MD
Rice	Rice University	1550	2. Top-Tier Private	TX
MIT	Mass. Inst. of Technology	1545-1560	1. Ivy Level	MA
Stanford	Stanford University	1545		CA
Yale	Yale University	1540		CT
UC	University of Chicago	1540		IL
Harvard	Harvard University	1520-1560		MA
Princeton	Princeton University	1500-1560		NJ
SMU	Southern Methodist Univ.	1400-1420	2. Top-Tier Private	TX
BYU	Brigham Young University Provo	1374	2. Top-Tier Private	UT
UT	Univ. of Texas at Austin	1360	3. Top Public Research	TX
BU	Baylor University	1305	2. Top-Tier Private	TX
UTD	Univ. of Texas at Dallas	1290	3. Top Public Research	TX
UD	University of Dallas	1290	2. Top-Tier Private	TX
OU	University of Oklahoma	1238	4. Mid-Tier Public	OK
UNT	University of North Texas	1160	4. Mid-Tier Public	TX
BYU-I	BYU-Idaho	1080-1090	5. Mid-Tier Private	ID
TWU	Texas Woman's University	1035-1060 (SAT optional)	6. Mid-Tier Public	TX
CCCC	Collin County Community College	Does *not* require SAT scores	7. Open Admission	TX

National Merit Scholarships

Item	Description
SNMQT Scholarship	National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (NMSQT)
Description	The NMSQT is the qualifying version of the PSAT/NMSQT—a standardized digital test that students take to be considered for recognition and scholarships through the National Merit Scholarship Program.
When to Take	Students typically take the PSAT/NMSQT as Juniors (11th grade)
Recognition	• 1.3 million students apply • 50,000 are recognized • 16,000 become semifinalists (Sept. of senior year) • 15,000 become finalists (later in senior year) • 7,500 are awarded (Top 0.5%) (later in senior year)

3 Reward Types	1. **National Merit $2500 Scholarship**
	   o One-time payment
	   o All finalists considered
	
	2. **Corporate-Sponsored Awards**
	   o For finalists meeting sponsor criteria
	   o May be one-time or renewable
	   o Renewable typically $1,000–$10,000/year
	   o Renewable one-time $2,500–$10,000
	
	3. **College-Sponsored Awards**
	   o Finalists must name that college as their first choice, apply, and not have another NMSC award
	   o Renewable up to 4 years
	   o Typical annual stipend range $500–$2,000/year
	   o Awards are tied to that institution and are canceled if the student changes/transfers schools.

Parental Help	• Make sure your student takes the PSAT/NMSQT in 11th grade
	• Keep grades strong
	• Be ready to complete the application promptly if they're named a semifinalist
	   o Essay
	   o Activities
	   o Recommendations

SAT Composition

Component	Time Allotted (minutes)	Number of Questions
Reading and Writing (R&W)	64 (2x 32-min)	54
Math	70 (2x 35-min)	44
Total	**134**	**98**

Reading and Writing (R&W) Structure

Item	Description
R&W Question Types	• 100% 4-Option Multiple Choice • Short passages (25–150 words)
Number of Questions	• Part 1: 27 questions, 32 min. • Part 2: 27 questions, 32 min.
Average Time Per Question	• 1 min. 11 sec.

Content Domain	Measures
1. Information and Ideas	• Comprehension, analysis, reasoning skills, and knowledge • Locate, interpret, evaluate, and integrate information and ideas • Texts and informational graphics (tables, bar graphs, and line graphs).
2. Craft and Structure	• Comprehension, vocabulary, analysis, synthesis, and reasoning skills and knowledge • Understand and use high-utility words and phrases in context • Evaluate texts rhetorically • Make connections between topically related texts
3. Expression of Ideas	• Revise texts to improve the effectiveness of written expression • Meet specific rhetorical goals
4. Standard English Conventions	• Edit text to conform to core conventions of Standard English • Sentence structure • Usage (grammar) • Punctuation

Math Structure

Item	Description
Math Question Types	• 75% 4-Option Multiple Choice • 25% Student Produced Format (SPF)
Number of Questions	• Part 1: 22 questions, 35 min. • Part 2: 22 questions, 35 min.
Average Time Per Question	• 1 min. 35 sec.

Content Domain	Measures
1. Algebra	• Linear equations in 1 variable • Linear equations in 2 variables • Linear functions • Systems of 2 linear equations in 2 variables • Linear inequalities in 1 or 2 variables
2. Advanced Math (STEM)	• Equivalent expressions • Nonlinear equations in 1 variable • Systems of equations in 2 variables • Nonlinear functions (absolute value, quadratic, exponential, polynomial, rational, radical)
3. Problem Solving and Data Analysis	• Ratios, rates, proportional relationships, and units • Percentages • One-variable data: distributions and measures of center and spread (Statistics) • Two variable data: models and scatterplots (Statistics) • Probability and conditional probability • Inference from sample statistics and margin of error • Evaluating statistical claims: observational studies and experiments
4. Geometry and Trigonometry	• Area and volume formulas • Lines, angles, and triangles • Right triangles and trigonometry • Circles

SAT Score Goals & Timeline

Tip	Description

Realistic Target Score Goals	~2.34 SAT points per hour of tutoring
	
	Research on improvement from the first SAT exam
	• ≥6 hours = +21 points
	• ≥6-8 hours = +90 points
	• ≥20 hours = +115 points
	• ~+21-39 points when students also:
	    ○ Took at least one full practice test
	    ○ Leveled up skills
	    ○ Followed personalized recommendations
	Source: A joint College Board–Khan Academy technical report (2020)

Early Start Advantage	Typical SAT Score Improvement vs. Hours Studied (Illustrative) — Typical prep (general study) --- Structured prep (full tests + targeted review) ● Reference anchors (20h, 115 pts) (7h, 90 pts) Score Gain (points) vs. Hours of Study (cumulative)
Prep Timeline	Best: 3x week for 9 weeks Budget: 1x week for 6 weeks Worst: None
Score Boosting Strategy	Top strategies supported across all research sources: 1. Start with an official diagnostic 2. Use adaptive, digital practice to match real conditions 3. Review your mistakes more than you take new tests 4. Prioritize accuracy early in adaptive modules 5. Study consistently, not crammed 6. Track patterns: pacing, error types, and question categories

Tips & Strategies

Tip	Description

Calculators	**Allowed**
	• Scientific calculators
	    ○ TI-83 Plus, TI-84 Plus, TI-84 Plus CE, TI-84 Plus CE Python
	    ○ TI-Nspire CX (non-CAS), TI-Nspire CX II (non-CAS)
	• Graphing calculators (as long as they are non-CAS)
	    ○ Desmos
	    ○ Casio fx-9750GII / III, Casio fx-CGG50 (Prizm)
	    ○ HP-39, -40, -48, -50 series, HP Prime (in exam mode)
	    ○ Sharp EL-5200, EL-9200, EL-9300, EL-9600
	
	Not Allowed
	• Calculators with CAS (symbolic algebra)
	    ○ TI-Nspire CAS, TI-89 Titanium, TI-92 Plus
	    ○ HP 48Gii, HP 49G, HP 50G (CAS)
	• Calculators with wireless/Bluetooth/internet
	• Calculators with QWERTY keyboards
	• Calculators with stylus input
	• Mobile phone calculator apps
	
	SAT Calculator Policy

Penalty for Guessing	• The SAT does NOT deduct points for wrong answers. • A wrong answer gives you 0 points, and a correct answer gives you +1 point—so guessing can only help you.
Trig Questions	Each SAT exam has no more than 4 trigonometry questions
Rewards	The Digital SAT rewards consistency, accuracy, digital familiarity, and targeted practice, not brute-force memorization.
Timed	Practice under timed, adaptive conditions.
3-Ways to Solve	Every SAT math question has at least three (3) different ways it can be solved: 1. Graphically (geometry, graph, diagram, table) 2. Algebraically (equation, model) 3. Calculator (TI-84 Plus C) 4. Computer App (Desmos, WolframAlpha, ChatGPT, Google) 5. Intuition (If numbers are hard to add, pretend they are currency)

Stress Management

Advice	Explanation
1. Do a "dry run" week	Take 1 full, timed practice test at the same time of day as your real SAT to reduce surprise stress.
2. Use box breathing	Use box breathing (4 seconds in, hold 4, out 4, hold 4) for 2–3 minutes before you start and anytime you feel panicky.
3. Make a simple test-day checklist	**Checklist:** • ID • Admission ticket • Pencils • Calculator (fully charged or with fresh batteries) • Snack • Water • Hoodie Pack it the night before.
4. Follow a sleep plan for 3 nights	Consistent bedtime/wake time; don't try to "cram-sleep" only the night before.
5. Caffeine rules	Take no more caffeine than what you normally drink—no "extra" on test day (it can spike anxiety).
6. Warm up for 5–10 minutes	Warm up for 5–10 minutes with a few easy problems to get your brain going instead of jumping in cold.
7. Use a reset phrase	Use a reset phrase when you get stuck: "Skip, mark, return." Move on quickly to protect your momentum.
8. Time checkpoints	Glance at the clock only at planned moments (e.g., every 10 questions) to avoid constant time anxiety.
9. Micro muscle release	Drop your shoulders, unclench your jaw, and relax your hands between passages/sections.
10. Break strategy	During breaks, stand up, sip water, eat a small snack, and take slow breaths—avoid post-mortem questions with others.
11. Hydration	Drink plenty of water. Dehydration can affect mental performance.

Resources

Resource (Links)	Description
College Board Bluebook App	The platform students must use to take the digital SAT, replacing the traditional paper-and-pencil format. • Official SAT practice exams • Desmos graphing calculator • Performance analytics • Locked-down, secure browser during actual test
College Board Bluebook Practice Tests	Free.
Khan Academy Official SAT Practice	Free.
Union Test Prep Free Study Guides	Free. Study Guides: • Reading/Writing • Math • Essay

Sources

- CollegeBoard (2026). SAT Suite of Assessments. https://sat.collegeboard.org