

SAT GUIDE 2026

A practical, student-first guide to the Digital SAT

Understand the exam. Build the right skills. Practice with purpose. Walk in prepared.

Prepared for students, parents, and counsellors

Updated: September 2026

How to Use This Guide

Use the guide as a roadmap, not as a substitute for the official College Board website.

The 2026 SAT is a digital, adaptive assessment. The highest-value preparation is not simply completing more questions; it is identifying why an answer was missed, repairing that skill, and proving the improvement under timed conditions.

Important: Dates, fees, test-center availability, device rules, score policies, and college requirements can change. Verify registration and policy details directly with College Board before making decisions.

At a glance

- Two scored sections: Reading and Writing, followed by Math.
- Each section has two modules; performance in the first module influences the difficulty level of the second.
- Total score: 400–1600; Reading and Writing and Math are each scored 200–800.
- Testing time is about 2 hours 14 minutes, plus a 10-minute break.
- The exam is taken in Bluebook on an approved device.

Best preparation loop

- Diagnose with an official adaptive practice test.
- Classify every error: concept, interpretation, process, timing, or careless execution.
- Study the smallest skill that explains the error.
- Redo the question without looking at the answer.
- Re-test the skill later under time pressure.

Official structure and rules are published by College Board. [web:17][web:33]

Exam Structure & Scoring

Know the operating system of the test before you train for performance.

Section	Modules	Questions	Time	Main domains
Reading and Writing	2	54	64 min	Information and Ideas; Craft and Structure; Expression of Ideas; Standard English Conventions
Math	2	44	70 min	Algebra; Advanced Math; Problem-Solving and Data Analysis; Geometry and Trigonometry

The two sections are scored separately and combined into a total score. Do not treat one difficult question as proof that your score is falling: the adaptive design uses overall performance and scoring models rather than a simple percentage-correct calculation.

Adaptive testing in plain language

- Module 1 gives the test an initial picture of your skills.
- Module 2 is selected based on your Module 1 performance.
- Because the route can differ between students, comparing raw question counts is not a reliable way to compare scores.
- Your preparation should therefore include both fundamentals and the ability to work accurately on harder questions.

What the score is—and is not

- It is evidence of performance on this assessment, not a complete measure of intelligence or college readiness.
- A target score should be connected to the requirements and expectations of your prospective colleges.
- Use section scores and skill feedback to decide what to study next, rather than chasing the total alone.

Reading and Writing Playbook

Short passages still demand careful reading. The winning habit is precision, not speed for its own sake.

The section combines reading comprehension, rhetorical judgment, and grammar/editing. Each question is tied to a short passage or set of notes, so students must read for the exact task being asked.

High-value skills

- Information and Ideas: identify the claim, evidence, implication, or relationship directly supported by the text.
- Craft and Structure: track purpose, tone, word meaning in context, and how a passage is organized.
- Expression of Ideas: choose transitions, sentence placement, and revisions that make an argument coherent.
- Standard English Conventions: control boundaries, agreement, form, and punctuation.

A repeatable method

- Read the question stem before over-reading the passage.
- Predict the answer category: evidence, inference, transition, grammar, or revision.
- Eliminate choices that are too broad, too extreme, unsupported, or grammatically incomplete.
- For grammar, identify the tested rule before comparing answer choices.
- For transitions, read the sentence before and after the blank and state the relationship in your own words.

Common trap: a choice can be true in general but still fail to answer the precise question. Train yourself to ask, “Where is this supported?” rather than “Does this sound reasonable?”

Math Playbook

Build a small set of reliable tools, then learn when each tool is efficient.

The Math section covers four broad domains. The goal is not to memorise every possible form of a problem; it is to recognise the underlying structure and execute cleanly.

Core skill map

- Algebra: linear equations, inequalities, systems, and relationships represented in context.
- Advanced Math: nonlinear equations, quadratics, polynomials, exponents, and equivalent forms.
- Problem-Solving and Data Analysis: ratios, rates, percentages, statistics, probability, and data interpretation.
- Geometry and Trigonometry: area, volume, lines, angles, triangles, circles, and right-triangle relationships.

The three-pass approach

- Translate: write what the problem gives and what it asks.
- Choose: decide whether algebra, estimation, a table, graphing, or the embedded calculator is fastest.
- Verify: check units, signs, reasonableness, and whether the answer matches the question.

Calculator discipline

- Use the Bluebook calculator when it reduces repetitive work or helps inspect a graph.
- Do not use a calculator to replace understanding of equations or expressions.
- Practise the exact interface before test day.
- If bringing a handheld calculator, verify that it is permitted; College Board also provides an embedded calculator in Bluebook. [web:33]

Mini-example: If a linear model gives a negative time or a probability above 1, the arithmetic may be correct but the interpretation is not. Always check whether the result makes sense in context.

A 12-Week Preparation Plan

Adjust the pace to your baseline, target, school workload, and test date.

Weeks	Primary objective	Evidence of progress
1–2	Baseline and setup	Official adaptive test; error taxonomy; target and schedule
3–5	Repair foundations	Skill lessons; untimed accuracy; short mixed sets
6–8	Build application	Timed modules; difficult questions; weekly error review
9–10	Simulate and refine	Full-length practice; pacing decisions; section balance
11	Stabilise performance	Second-to-last mock; targeted repair; test-day rehearsal
12	Protect readiness	Light review; logistics; sleep and confidence routine

Weekly operating rhythm

- One diagnostic or timed block.
- Two to four focused skill sessions.
- One error-log review and redo session.
- One lighter day for reading, formula recall, or rest.

A schedule that you can repeat beats an ambitious schedule that collapses after one week.

The Error Log That Actually Helps

A wrong answer is useful only when it changes what you do next.

For each missed or guessed question, record: the skill, your approach, the exact failure point, the corrected approach, and a future trigger that will help you recognise the same pattern.

Recommended error categories

- Concept gap: I did not know the rule or relationship.
- Interpretation gap: I misunderstood what the text, graph, or question asked.
- Process error: I knew the idea but used an unreliable sequence of steps.
- Timing error: I spent too long or rushed the final decision.
- Careless execution: sign, unit, copying, punctuation, or arithmetic mistake.
- Strategic miss: I failed to eliminate, estimate, flag, or verify efficiently.

The 24–72–7 review cycle

- Within 24 hours: redo the question without the explanation.
- Within 72 hours: solve a fresh question testing the same skill.
- After 7 days: test the skill in a mixed timed set.

Do not write “silly mistake” and move on. Replace it with a controllable diagnosis such as “I did not check the sign after distributing the negative.” That diagnosis creates a behaviour you can practise.

Practice Resources & Smart Use

Use authentic resources for measurement and targeted resources for learning.

Bluebook and official practice

- Use Bluebook for full-length digital adaptive practice tests and interface familiarity.
- Complete a practice test under realistic conditions; do not pause repeatedly or consult notes.
- Review the score report and use it to choose the next skill—not merely to celebrate or worry about the number.

Khan Academy and skill practice

- Use targeted lessons and practice after a diagnostic identifies a gap.
- Move from guided examples to independent questions.
- Stop repeating easy questions once accuracy is stable; shift to transfer and timing.

Student Question Bank and third-party material

- Use official question banks where possible for authentic wording and difficulty.
- Use third-party material for volume, but do not assume every question mirrors College Board style.
- Never let an unofficial score prediction override your official practice trend.

College Board lists Bluebook, testing rules, and the current SAT structure on its official resources. [web:17][web:33]

Registration, Device & Test-Day Readiness

Remove avoidable uncertainty before the morning of the exam.

Before registering

- Create or confirm your College Board account details.
- Check available test dates, centers, deadlines, fees, and score-release information on the official registration page.
- Confirm whether your target colleges require, recommend, or do not consider SAT scores.
- Request approved accommodations early if applicable; do not wait until test week.

Device checklist

- Confirm that your laptop or tablet meets current Bluebook requirements.
- Install Bluebook and complete the required exam setup before test day.
- Charge the device fully and bring a charger or portable power bank where allowed.
- If you need a device loan, request it through College Board before the applicable deadline; approval is not guaranteed. [web:33]

What to bring / what not to bring

- Bring your admission ticket, acceptable photo ID, approved device, charger, and an approved calculator if you choose to use one.
- Scratch paper is provided by testing staff.
- Phones, smartwatches, earbuds, notes, and unauthorised electronic devices are prohibited; follow the current College Board rules. [web:33]

Do a complete Bluebook rehearsal at least once: sign in, complete setup, use the tools, practise flagging, and submit the test.

Test-Day Strategy

Calm execution is a trained skill.

Before the test

- Prepare logistics the night before.
- Sleep sufficiently rather than attempting a late-night cram.
- Eat and hydrate in a way that is familiar to you.
- Arrive with time for check-in and device setup.

During each module

- Keep moving when a question becomes unusually expensive.
- Flag strategically and return only if time allows.
- Use elimination before guessing; never leave an answer blank if the interface permits a response.
- Protect the final minutes for unanswered items and quick checks.

If technology goes wrong

- Stay in the testing environment and follow staff instructions.
- Do not open other applications or use a phone.
- If answers are not submitted because of a connection issue, follow the current College Board instructions for reconnection and submission. [web:33]

Your objective is not to feel no anxiety. It is to have a process that still works while you feel some anxiety.

Choosing Your Preparation Model

The right model depends on your starting point and how much feedback you need.

Model	Works well when	Watch-out
Self-study	You can plan weekly work, analyse mistakes, and stay consistent	You may lose time diagnosing the wrong problem
Group class	You benefit from shared explanation and fixed structure	The pace may not match your exact skill gaps
1:1 coaching	You need personalised pacing, accountability, and detailed feedback	Quality depends on tutor expertise and the review process
Hybrid	You want expert direction plus independent practice	Requires clear ownership of what happens between sessions

Questions to ask any SAT provider

- How do you diagnose errors beyond the score?
- How often do students complete realistic adaptive mocks?
- Who reviews the mock and how are next steps assigned?
- What is included: materials, recordings, doubt support, rescheduling, and progress reports?
- Can you show anonymised evidence of process and outcomes without guaranteeing a score?

Parents & Students: The Partnership

The strongest preparation environment balances ambition with sustainable habits.

For students

- Own the weekly plan and report honestly when a task was not completed.
- Ask “why did I miss this?” before asking for another worksheet.
- Protect sleep, school responsibilities, and regular breaks.
- Use scores as feedback, not identity.

For parents

- Ask about skill progress, not only the latest total score.
- Help protect a predictable study window and a low-distraction environment.
- Avoid comparing a student’s timeline with another student’s timeline.
- Before enrolling, ask to see the diagnostic, feedback, and progress process.

A useful weekly conversation is: What improved? What remains unstable? What is the next smallest action?