

The Best SAT Prep Study Resources

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Whether you take a class, work with a tutor, do an online program, or study on your own, good study resources are key when preparing for the SAT. While you will do best to build your skills in textbooks, especially in Math and Writing (which is no longer differentiated from the Reading section of the test, but still tests grammar, punctuation, and vocabulary in context) there is no substitute for practicing with digital facsimiles of [the new, digital SAT](#) to build skills that are directly transferable to the real test – which is now taken on a computer screen. Allow yourself at least 10-12 weeks to craft a full study plan and use only the best texts to guide you. Below is a collection of the top ones for SAT prep.

One big caveat: I've included the official College Board resources for the new exam: just 4 full digital practice tests and 1 mini-set of practice questions plus a single practice PSAT. Until the College Board offers a digital equivalent of the 2020 Official SAT Guide, I recommend reserving at least 2 of the official online digital practice tests to do closer to test dates and use the best of the previous SAT prep material below as follows:

[Official College Board Digital SAT practice](#) questions and practice tests - For students taking the digital PSAT or SAT, the College Board has just a few resources specifically for these tests, though more should be appearing in the coming year. From the link above, you'll be directed to download and install the College Board test app, [Bluebook](#), which you'll need for both practice tests and the real one. Yes, you'll be taking the SAT on your own laptop or other device!

There are only 4 official digital practice tests thus far, so use them as you are ready for them and do them timed so you get the real test experience. Before doing any of the full tests, however, you'll find a set of practice questions in the Bluebook app. You should do these in the app for a good introduction to the system and how it differs from the paper test, too. Answers and explanations for the 15 questions are provided in [this pdf](#).

[Khan Academy](#), which is integrated into the College Board's resources, is a great resource for SAT students – and they have new material for the digital SAT. Use them but note that the 4 tests there are the same ones that are in the College Board Bluebook app – which are the same ones that offered as text files in the new College Board Digital SAT Guide.

[The Official SAT Study Guide, 2020 Edition](#) by The College Board - The SAT prep "bible," with 8 official practice tests for the previous, paper-based SAT (through December 2023), plus full explanations of the answers in the book. As of this writing, the College Board has not published a new edition of this guide for the very different digital exam. But this guide is still a good study tool for much of the math and some of the reading and writing content of the new digital test

How to use the College Board book:

It's still good practice to do these tests, particularly for training in Math and Writing (that is, grammar, punctuation and context questions). The Reading test, however, is much changed, and it would be better to focus on materials specifically designed for the new test. However, for general reading comprehension skill improvement, this is still a useful tool. You can use tests as individual timed test sections or as untimed practice. After taking a test section, mark your errors with an "X" rather than writing the correct answer in. Then try to rethink and redo your errors. Finally, look over the answer explanations and analyze your mistakes. Reference [PWN the SAT Math Guide](#) (below) for better math explanations, too.

After taking Test 1 and analyzing your results, get to work with the Applerouth and PWN textbooks (see below) in a steady course of study. Every 2-4 weeks, take another practice test and analyze your results as you did for the first one. Remember: [The Official SAT Study Guide](#) is NOT a course. It is only a set of practice tests to gauge your progress through whatever course of study you are using to prepare for the SAT. Taking weekly practice tests is not a substitute for comprehensive SAT study for the new digital test which differs in approach to this knowledge set, particularly in the reading and writing section.

Applerouth's Guide to the SAT 5th Edition Applerouth is terrific for all sections of the test. In my opinion – as an SAT prep tutor with over 20 years' experience – it's the best by far! And unlike the more famous test prep publishers (e.g. The Princeton Review, Kaplan, Barrons'), when Applerouth rolls out a new edition, they change more than the cover art and a few random pages: Every new edition is substantially revised with added material and depth in new areas, based on recent real SATs, and revised chapters for topics in which students were seen to be struggling. The math chapters are particularly excellent – and challenging! This book is only available for purchase from the [Applerouth website](#).

How to use this book:

This book is a great tool for self-guided study or work with a tutor. Set a manageable pace through all multiple choice sections of the test – Writing, Reading and Math – reading each chapter, doing example questions as you go. Then do the drill at the end of the chapter, marking errors, rethinking and revising them when you are done.

PWN the SAT: Math Guide, 6th Edition by Mike McClenathan. I cannot praise this book enough. Run, don't walk, to buy this terrific and terrifically student-friendly guidebook to SAT Math. Also, check out the book's amazing companion website and blog, www.pwnestprep.com with especially useful, free tools, including the opportunity to ask your questions, which you can post for the author to answer himself! Be sure to check out "Daily PWN Practice," a link to individual SAT math questions with comprehensive explanations. It's a great daily challenge that helps you improve your math skills for the SAT every day – even when you don't have time to do a full math drill. Find previous drill questions by the month using this base URL: <https://pwnestprep.com/2023/01> for January, /02 for February, etc

How to use this book:

Partner this book with Applerouth for a complete study program. Their two approaches to the math are excellent complements. If you have a half year to study, complete one math chapter per week. If you have less time, jump to those topics you are weaker in. Don't skip the reading and the examples in your hurry to get to drill questions at the end of each chapter! After completing each drill, read through the explanations of all the questions – even those you got correct – to learn Mike's approach to them – which might be different from yours and thus add to your skillset.

SAT prep - to infinity and beyond?

In order to achieve your best scores, you should complete all of the Applerouth chapters, all the PWN lessons and the book of College Board official practice tests, focusing on the online resources for the closest to actual test experience. That's a full 3-6 months of after-school and weekend prep. But what if you want more? Continue with the resources below – or weave them into your study from the start:

- **Take more digital practice SATs.**

There are few real digital SATs out there, but by the time you've taken the real SAT three times, you should have completed the all 4 official practice tests, as well as the practice digital PSAT offered by the College Board via Bluebook app. Beyond those, use digital practice tests offered by brand-name SAT prep publishers, such as The Princeton Review, Kaplan, Test Innovators or Barron's.

- **Use those PSATs!**

Don't scorn the PSAT just because it is shorter than the SAT and supposedly easier. It's based on the SAT and made by the same test maker, so it's an excellent study tool and plenty challenging. Take the PSAT every time it is offered at your school and use the College Board online tools afterwards to gain some insight into your performance.

- **Read a variety of articles in a challenging periodical – daily.**

Build your reading comprehension and vocabulary for the SAT Reading, Writing and Essay sections by spend 10 minutes per day reading short articles in the New York Times or other challenging newspaper. (Get a monthly subscription to the NYT or see if your school offers a student subscription.) Try a sampling of the top stories but at least read the headlines. Then read whatever topic in the paper interests you and also the opinion pieces (editorials, movie reviews, etc) to build rhetorical skills and comprehension.

Other good publications for challenging writing and vocabulary: The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, The Guardian (UK newspaper), Sports Illustrated, Smithsonian Magazine, New York Magazine, The New Yorker, WIRED, National Geographic, GQ, Vanity Fair, Esquire.

If you want to look up 1-3 words you encounter each time, that's good, too.

- **Build your vocabulary by learning 1-2 new words daily.**

Download the free [Visual Vocab CORE app](#) for your iPhone or Android phone.

Here's how to best use this app:

- On the Home screen, touch the star at top right so it becomes white inside. This will activate "My Deck" which is your personal collection of words from the bigger list. You'll see "My Deck" at the top of each word's picture screen so you know you have it activated.
 - Then, still on the Home screen, go to the red square at top left. Click on that to access the entire word list.
 - Click the star on right side of the words you want to study TODAY. The star should turn white inside.
 - Now, you will only see those words you've starred as you flip through the flashcards in "My Deck."
 - Only quiz yourself on words you've studied with the app or kinda-sorta already know.
 - Add 2 words/day and just drill yourself on those words. Do not do the entire list or the built-in quizzes until you've mastered the ENTIRE collection.
 - When you've mastered a word so well you don't want to see it again, unstar it in the word list or go to the left side of the word list and put an X to block it out.
- Use this app while riding on the bus or in the car or any in between time you have: a few moments at a time for a total of no more than 5 minutes a day. If you enjoy it and are learning the words, buy the advanced version which contains the first 50 words as review and an additional 250 new words. Before you take the SAT your final time, you should definitely know every word on the full collection of Visual Vocab apps.

Whatever course of SAT study you choose, set yourself challenging but realistic goals that keep you moving forward at a pace that does not compromise your school work. Although you may feel the going is slow – especially in math, where one or two sticky problems can easily suck up a half hour of your time – don't despair! Everything you learn through these study materials will eventually translate into points on the test. While your SAT improvement may seem inconsistent, you will see your knowledge grow – with new vocabulary, better grammar, swifter math abilities. Trust in yourself, stick to your study plan, and you can be confident that you're taking ownership of this test and will achieve your best results in the process.



About the author, Karen Berlin Ishii:

Karen Berlin Ishii, a Brown University graduate with over twenty years' experience as an academic and test prep teacher, tutors students via video chat all over the world. She specializes in reading, writing, grammar, math, and preparation for the SAT, ACT, SSAT, ISEE and other standardized tests.

Learn more about Karen and find test prep tips and goodies at www.karenberlinishii.com.

