

A GLIMPSE INTO UPCOMING CHANGES AND RECENT UPDATES: SAT – ACT

*Now Reflecting the Most Recent College Board
Announcements*

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Background

What prompted the the College Board's bold pronouncement?

- ACT has increased in popularity and status
 - Pulls ahead of SAT just slightly in 2012 & 2013
 - 12 states now *require*, and pay for, juniors to take the test
 - Now boasts of closer alignment to Common Core
 - Conventional wisdom: SAT – “reasoning” --- ACT – “achievement”
- Rise of the Common Core Paradigm
 - CCSS (*Common Core State Standards*) – a significant curricular trend
 - Almost nation-wide acceptance of educational standards established by grade level
 - Ultimate goal is to guide students, K – 12, to college and workplace readiness

Enter David Coleman – *“Architect of the Common Core”*

- Becomes president of the College Board –announces major changes to the SAT
 - Shortcomings of the SAT provide a “call to action.”*
 - *“It is time to admit that the SAT and the ACT have become far too disconnected from the work of our high school students.”**
 - SAT will embrace the spirit of the CCSS
 - *“The test will become visibly integrated with the most important work kids do in high school.” ***
- * Comments by David Coleman during College Board Press Release, 3/5/14
 - ** Comment by David Coleman to Brookings Institution, 11/29/12

SAT Change – Time Frame and Rollout

- Previous modifications in 1994 & 2005
- New PSAT to be released in October 2015
- New SAT to be released March 2016
- Full set of SAT test specifications and complete collection of sample test questions to be released on April 16, 2014
- Test will be offered in both paper-based and computerized versions (the latter at selected locations only)
 - Digitized version is most likely to keep pace with the ACT changes

SAT “Overhaul”

Overview of Changes

- New Test will Have 3 Sections:
 1. **Evidence-Based Reading and Writing:** a seeming merger of the old critical reading and writing sections
 2. **Math**
 3. **Essay** (optional)
- Total Length of the test will be 3 hours, plus 50 minutes for the “optional” essay (College Board claims that this timing might be altered as it does additional research)
- New Test will revert to its 1600 scaled score
 - 800 scale for reading / writing section and math section
 - Essay score to be reported separately
- Science and Social Studies will be used as context for both verbal and math components of the test
- New Test Eliminates the Guessing Penalty!

In Depth View of Changes

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- New SAT will focus only on “relevant” words
 - Officially ends the classic “SAT Word” (See later sidebar)
 - Will test words whose meanings may vary according to how their used within passages
 - Most likely will mark the end of the sentence completion question
- Evidence, Evidence and more Evidence!
 - Verbal and math components of the New SAT to put heavy emphasis on interpretation and integration of *evidence*
 - Students will analyze texts, charts, tables and other sources to draw conclusions
 - Students will be asked directly to cite specific evidence that leads to those conclusions
 - On questions that measure writing skills, students will analyze paragraphs for grammatical and substantive soundness

In Depth View of Changes (continued):

- Math Section of the test will now measure a more limited range of topics:
 1. “Problem Solving and Data Analysis”
 - Proportional reasoning (ratios and percents) as applied to real-life situations in science, social science and other workplace contexts
 - Most likely will involve heightened focus on interpreting graphs and integrating information from these varied sources to draw conclusions
 2. “The Heart of Algebra”
 - Will focus on linear equations and systems of equations, both cited as crucial tools in the abstraction process
 3. “Passport to Advanced Math”
 - Not too much elaboration is offered here, other than that the test will measure command of more complex equations, perhaps quadratics and higher order functions

In Depth View of Changes (continued):

- Full overview of changes to the math section still not clear
 - College Board has reserved the right to research further areas to test
- Like the verbal section, math section on the new SAT will emphasize context and evidence
 - Students may be asked to evaluate real-world situations and to apply algebraic and statistical concepts to draw conclusions
- Graphical analysis and interpretation sounds very similar to the Science section of the ACT!
 - Not surprising that the College Board would align itself to the one part of the ACT for which there has been no SAT equivalent – Science
- Partial end of calculator use!
 - Students will not be allowed to use calculators on some math questions

In Depth View of Changes (continued):

- Essay changes on the New SAT:
 - Essay will now be “optional”
 - Like its ACT counterpart, however, most competitive colleges will require it
- Essay will abandon the “free response” format and ask students to read and analyze a source document
 - Essay will comprise an assessment of how the author of the document crafts his or her argument and line of reasoning
- Essay prompt will remain the same, but the source document(s) will vary from test to test
- Length of essay section goes from 25 to 50 minutes
- Should have the feel of an AP document-based question

In Depth View of Changes (continued):

- “Founding Documents and the Great Global Conversation”
 - At least one selection of every new test administration will present a seminal document from American history (particularly the Constitution, Declaration of Independence, etc.) or from world history
 - As with other readings, student will be asked to analyze and interpret, citing evidence for those findings
 - Intended to engage the student in principles that extend beyond the college/work-place-readiness idea and that embrace the concept of national and world citizenship
 - Not a bad fringe benefit: Students will get to read these crucial founding documents as well as other works addressing freedom, justice, liberty and the rights of humankind
 - Might this be an obstacle for international students?

Sidebar:

Is this the Last Hurrah for the “SAT Word”?

Is the word “arcane” too arcane?

- David Coleman claims the SAT is noted for “SAT Words” or “words you will never use again.”
 - He offers words that one most needs to know:
 - *transform, deliberate, hypothesis, distill*
 - Others at the College Board have suggested that a word like “unscrupulous” is arcane or obscure
- Academics have pushed back, claiming the this denigration of vocabulary may devalue language
- What constitutes an SAT word? (And why might they be so useless in our lives?)
 - Perhaps these words might be obscure:
 - *treachery, mawkish, flotsam, jettison, byzantine, prestidigitation?*
 - But are these challenging words useless?:
 - *garrulous, mendacious, ineffable, exculpate, capricious, perfunctory*
- SAT Vocabulary may not be the irrelevant dinosaur that it is being characterized as

Potential Obstacles to Aligning the SAT to the CCSS

Can we simply treat the SAT as a “Common Core” Exam?

SAT

a norm-referenced exam

- Designed along a **bell curve distribution so that fewer than 10%** get most of the questions correct
- Purpose is to distinguish *top* students
- Designed to *identify* a student’s potential for success
- Acceptable, in fact, necessary, to have very demanding questions
- Seemingly, must test difficult words (*unscrupulous?*) because student performance must be distributed along the curve – easy to medium to difficult

CCSS Assessment

a criterion-referenced exam

- Designed so that a grade-level standard is set and most students meet or exceed that standard
- Purpose is to distinguish *failing* students
- Designed to *shape* a student’s potential for success
- Difficulty level of questions must stay within the more limited range of the grade-level standard
- Seemingly, must test “relevant” words that most students should know to excel at a certain grade level (*hypothesis, distill, etc.*)

SAT Changes: Long Term Implications

- How much could the test really change?
 - The more it changes, the less it will be trusted – at least in the short term
 - Entire claim for the integrity of the exam is the consistency of the results – measuring consistency will take time
 - How long could the College Board afford to lose market share while the test is being evaluated by colleges
 - College Board customers are the admissions officers not the students
 - Ultimately, they are the main arbiters in assessing the validity of the new test

SAT Changes: Long Term Implications

- Transitional Period – Implications for Class of 2017
 - Rush for juniors to take the 12/15 or 01/16 SAT?
 - Some students could take both the old *and* the new versions
- How long will it take for Colleges to trust the accuracy of the “New SAT”?
- Will College Advisors be recommending the ACT during this transitional period?
- Are these changes not simply to make the SAT more like the ACT?
 - And, in the process, more like Common Core?
- Consequently, the safe option for many students will be to stick with the ACT

Long Term Implications

- Is overhauling the test itself the only change that the College Board has in mind?
 - Taking the CCSS alignment to the next level
- Aligning the SAT to the CCSS would eventually reach beyond one college entrance exam
- Does College Board seek to arrange deals state-by-state, much as the ACT has done?
- Will this involve SAT-like assessments from early childhood onwards?
 - Does the College Board have its sights set on K – 12 assessments?

More Insight into Test Changes to Come

- Current experimental sections will be revealing
- More College Board announcements to come
 - College Board plans to release more details on the changes as well as extensive sample questions on April 16, 2014
- As with last change, College Board probably to release material during the spring/summer 2015

Changes to the ACT:

- Spring 2015 – ACT will offer a computerized version of test
- ACT will still offer paper-based version of the test
- ACT representatives have gone out of their way to stress that *the content of the test will essentially remain unchanged*
 - In doing so, ACT is preparing to absorb the SAT defectors who are seeking a more tried and true exam

ACT Changes

Potential Problems and Unanswered Questions

- Availability of Technology
- Will it be up to schools or individual students to select one version or another?
- Would free response questions be graded by computer?
- How many free response questions can one add and still maintain the equality of content between the two versions?