

SIDE BY SIDE: A LOOK AT THE SAT AND THE COMMON CORE

The College Board has provided an outline of key changes to the SAT, effective in 2016. Below is a College Board summary of the current and redesigned exam, plus an *Education Week* analysis providing relevant material in the Common Core State Standards.

	Current SAT	Redesigned SAT	Common Core
Citing Evidence	Reading and writing sections do not require students to cite evidence. Students select answers to demonstrate their understanding of texts but are not asked to support their answers.	Evidence-based reading and writing. Students will support answers with evidence, including questions that require them to cite a specific part of a passage to support their answer choice.	Citing specific “textual evidence” when interpreting material is a key thread of the common core. In the introduction, the English/language arts standards say college- and career-ready students “value evidence.” It says, “Students cite specific evidence when offering an oral or written interpretation of a text.”
Source Documents	Source documents do not represent a wide range of academic disciplines. While many different types of text might appear on any SAT, there is no requirement that students encounter scientific or historical sources.	Source documents originate from a wide range of academic disciplines. On every SAT, students will encounter source texts from science, history, and social studies, analyzing them the way they would in those classes.	The common core calls for teaching literacy across the curriculum. The English/language arts standards specifically highlight the teaching of reading, writing, and other literacy objectives in science, history/social studies, and technical subjects.
Vocabulary	Vocabulary focused on words that are sometimes obscure and not widely used in college and career. These words, while interesting and useful in specific instances, often lack broad utility in varied disciplines and contexts.	Vocabulary focused on words that are widely used in college and career. The exam will focus on words such as “synthesis” and “empirical” whose specific meaning depends on the context.	Students should develop “extensive vocabularies, built through reading and study,” the standards say. They should “determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues,” and “acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases ... at the college and career readiness level.”
Writing an Essay	The essay measures students’ ability to construct an argument based on their background and experiences. Since students are not given source material, there is no way to verify the accuracy of their argument or examples.	The essay measures students’ ability to analyze evidence and explain how an author builds an argument to persuade an audience. Responses will be evaluated based on the strength of the analysis as well as the coherence of the writing.	The writing section says students “must take task, purpose, and audience into careful consideration, choosing words, information, structures, and formats deliberately. . . . They have to become adept at gathering information, evaluating sources, and citing material accurately, reporting findings from their research and analysis of sources in a clear and cogent manner.”
Math Coverage	Math section samples content from a wide range of high school-level math. There are often only one or two questions on each topic and students need to cover a great deal of math to be prepared for all topics.	Math section draws from fewer topics that evidence shows most contribute to student readiness for college and career training. Students can study these core math areas in depth and have confidence that they will be assessed.	A key priority of the math common core is to cover fewer topics in greater depth. Also, the document says, “The high school standards specify the mathematics that all students should study in order to be college and career ready.”
Calculators	Calculator permitted for full math section. It is difficult to assess students’ sense of numbers, their fluency in calculation, and their ability understand concepts rather than plug in the answers.	Calculator permitted on certain portions of the math section. The calculator can be used where most appropriate, but the no-calculator section allows greater assessment of students’ understanding, fluency, and technique.	Students should “use appropriate tools strategically,” the math standards say. Proficient students use “technological tools to explore and deepen their understanding of concepts.” (Both the PARCC and Smarter Balanced testing consortia plan to allow calculators on some but not all portions of their exams.)
Analyzing Text and Data	Reading and writing does not require data analysis. The reading and writing section does not often include passages from science and social studies with graphs and tables; questions rarely require students to both read text and analyze data.	Students asked to analyze both text and data in real world contexts, including identifying and correcting inconsistencies between the two. Students will show the work they do throughout their classes by reading science articles and historical and social studies sources.	Students should gain knowledge from “challenging” scientific and technical texts that “often make extensive use of elaborate diagrams and data to convey information and illustrate concepts.” They must be able to read such texts “with independence and confidence because the vast majority of reading in college and workforce training programs will be sophisticated nonfiction.”
Founding Documents	Source documents drawn from texts that are not widely recognized and publicly available. Students have no idea before they take the test what the reading passages will be about.	Each exam will include a passage drawn from the Founding [U.S.] Documents or the Great Global Conversation. Students read from either a founding document such as the Declaration of Independence or from the conversation they inspire in the United States and around the world, such as Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address or King’s “I Have a Dream” speech.	The grades 9–10 reading standards call for students to “analyze seminal U.S. documents of historical and literary significance (e.g., Washington’s Farewell Address, the Gettysburg Address, Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms speech, King’s ‘Letter from Birmingham Jail’), including how they address related themes and concepts.” A companion standard for grades 11–12 calls for reading “foundational U.S. documents,” including the Declaration of Independence.
Incorrect Answers	Scoring deducts points for incorrect answers. Students get ¼ point deducted for incorrect answers; no points deducted for omitted answers.	Scoring does not deduct points for incorrect answers. Students are encouraged to select the best answer to every question.	
Essay	Essay is required.	Essay is optional.	
Scoring	Score scale of 2400.	Score scale of 1600 with separate score for Essay.	
Format	SAT available on paper only.	Available in paper and digital forms.	

SOURCE: College Board, Education Week