Welcome to the Revolution

The "New" SAT Is a Big Deal

For many anxious parents and their children, March Madness won't refer this year to the NCAA basketball championships, or to college students' perennial spring break pilgrimage to Florida or southern California. Instead, March Madness will refer to the big changes afoot for you: the college-bound high school student. Unless you've just emerged from a year-long coma, you've probably heard from a million sources—newspapers, magazines, the Net, your friends, your teachers, your panicked parents—that the SAT will undergo radical changes this year.

Believe them, it will. The test publishers have tinkered with the SAT from time to time over the past few decades, but never producing anything like the seismic SAT changes that will show up in the 2004-05 academic year:

- Analogy questions have been dropped to make room for questions about very short reading passages (60-140 words long). These passages, together with the traditional reading passages (450-800 words long) and sentence completion questions, now make up the renamed SAT Reading Test.

- Quantitative comparison questions have been dropped from the SAT Math Test, and the overall difficulty has been ratcheted up a few notches. Previously, the math covered on the SAT was limited to basic topics from seventh-grade through ninth-grade curriculums. (The problems were not always easy, of course, but the underlying concepts were.) Sorry, but now you'll face a few topics drawn from tenth- and eleventh-grade math curriculums, too.

- The really big change is the introduction of the SAT Writing Test, This section will consist of a written essay portion and a multiple-choice portion covering grammatical and other writing problems. (If you're thinking, "Hey, that sounds exactly like the SAT II Writing Test," you're right. Or rather, exactly like the former SAT II Writing Test, which has now been retired.)

And since the new SAT Writing Test will have its own 200 to 800 score, a "perfect" SAT ia now 2400 rather than the 1600 your parents and possibly grandparents remember.

WHAT IS THE NEW SAT?

The SAT I, which has not changed much since 1994, will be significantly changed as of March 2005. If you're lucky, you may not be familiar with the old SAT. And this book contains practice tests and advice targeting only the new test, the one on which you are focused, so you won't be confused.

The new SAT I—from now on we'll refer to it as simply the SAT—runs 3 hours and 45 minutes and is divided into ten sections:

- Two 25-minute Math sections
- One 20-minute Math section
- Two 25-minute Critical Reading sections
- One 20-minute Critical Reading section
- One 25-minute multiple-choice Writing section
- One 10-minute multiple-choice Writing section
- One 25-minute essay section
- One additional 25-minute Writing, Math, or Critical Reading experimental section

The essay will be the first section of the SAT and will take 25 minutes. Be sure to visit your online resources for the latest updates on the SAT's format and a whole lot more!

HOW IS THE NEW SAT SCORED?

Four to five weeks after you take the SAT, you'll receive a report containing your Math, Critical Reading, and Writing scores. You may choose to access your scores online, in which case you'll get them a little faster. Each score will be reported on a scale that runs from 200 to 800, and the average student scores around 500. Scores go up or down in increments of 10 points.

The total maximum score is now 2400 points instead of 1600. (Before you know it, you'll be able to brag to older folks that their 1400s are nothing compared to your SAT scores.) You'll also hear about two other kinds of scores in connection with the SAT and other standardized tests: raw score and percentile scores. Your raw score is simply the number of questions you answered correctly, minus a fraction of the number of questions you answered incorrectly, and is used to calculate your final scaled score (200 to 800). A perceritile score tells you how you did in relation to everyone else who took the test. If your score is in the 60th percentile, it means you did better on the test than 60 percent of the people who took it. People who are disappointed by their SAT scores can sometimes cheer themselves up by looking at their percentile scores.

WHERE DOES THE SAT COME FROM?

The SAT is published by the Educational Testing Service (ETS). ETS is a big company. It sells not only the SAT, but also about 500 other tests, including ones for CIA agents, golf pros, travel agents, firefighters, and barbers. ETS is located outside of Princeton, New Jersey, on a beautiful 400-acre estate that used to be a hunting club. The buildings where the SAT is written are surrounded by woods and hills. There is a swimming pool, a goose pond, a baseball diamond, lighted tennis courts, jogging trails, an expensive house for the company's president, a chauffeured motor pool, and a private hotel where rooms cost more than $200 a night.

You may have been told that ETS is a government agency or that it's part of Princeton University. It is neither. ETS is just a private company that makes a lot of money selling tests. The company that hires ETS to write the SAT is called the College Entrance Examination Board, or the College Board.