

## Key shifts of the SAT redesign

The College Board announced a significant overhaul of the SAT college admission test on Wednesday, changes that will affect current high school freshmen who plan to take the test as juniors in two years. The following chart compares the current SAT to the redesigned SAT. Comments for consideration are included. Sample questions and test examples for the new test have not yet been released.

Current SAT

**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.

Redesigned SAT

**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.

**COMMENT:** Common Core examples have shown that reading sections provided to students are incomplete or biased in the content. This emphasis on evidence “from the specific passage” disallows students from drawing on evidence from other sources, only drawing conclusions from the passage itself.

Current

**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

Redesigned

**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.

**COMMENT:** There is no limit to the range of texts currently used in the SAT. The telling statement here is “analyzing them the way they would in those classes”. This would necessarily disallow a business perspective on a historical document or an engineering perspective on a science document, thus limiting the breadth and depth of thinking students can demonstrate.

Current

**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.

Redesigned

**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.

**COMMENT:** A strong basis of vocabulary has traditionally been demonstrated both on having a working knowledge of many words, but also, in a student’s ability to dissect an unknown word to determine its meaning. When schools taught Greek & Latin roots, students were well versed in this skill. Since Common Core does not encourage the teaching of Greek & Latin roots, they must limit the SAT assessment strictly to vocabulary.

Current

**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.

Redesigned

**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.

**COMMENT:** As in the example above, the student is restricted to using the “facts and evidence” as presented regardless of its inaccuracy, incompleteness or bias.

Current

**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.

Redesigned

**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.

**COMMENT:** Specifically, since Common Core only requires high school students to learn math through a modified, incomplete version of Algebra II, no questions relating to full-scope Algebra II, trigonometry, statistics or calculus would be included in the redesigned SAT. Not mentioned, but necessary, is the redesign of questions regarding geometry from Euclidean proof-based questions, to Transformation geometry.

Current

**Calculator permitted for full math section.** It is difficult to assess students' sense of numbers, their fluency in calculation, and their ability to understand concepts than plug in the answers.

Redesigned

**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.

**COMMENT:** Perhaps this is a reasonable improvement, although there is concern if emphasis is on technique. Will the redesigned SAT require, as Common Core does, students to demonstrate the ability to solve a problem three ways and write a paragraph rather than emphasize calculating a correct answer?

Current

**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.

Redesigned

**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 courses.

**COMMENT:** Notice the current SAT “does not often” require data analysis in writing, which means it does in fact include an assessment of this skill. How much writing which does not include data analysis will be retained? There are many purposes for writing, persuasive, fact based writing is but one of many. This redesign does not indicate if the SAT will continue to assess other types of writing skills.

Current

**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.

Redesigned

**Each exam will include a passage drawn from the Founding 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 Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a Dream" speech.

**COMMENT:** One serious concern to this redesign is the ease of teaching or prepping to the test. Students can be taught the “correct” responses to a pre-determined list of reading passages. Genuine, independent thinking from students is only assessed when they are challenged to respond to that which they are unlikely to have previously exposed to.

Current

**Scoring deducts points for incorrect answers.** Students get 1/4 point deducted for incorrect answers; no points deducted for omitted answers.

Redesigned

**Scoring does not deduct points for incorrect answers (rights-only scoring).** Students are encouraged to select the best answer to every question.

**COMMENT:** Test designers know that deductions for incorrect answers reduces the likelihood that students will guess. Reducing guessing increases the credibility of the scoring.

Current

**Essay is required.**

Redesigned

**Essay is optional.**

**COMMENT:** Why? Is essay writing considered unimportant? As noted above, the redesigned SAT appears to put maximum focus on persuasive writing over any other form of writing, which short-changes the value of other writing strategies.

Current

**Score scale of 2400.**

Redesigned

**Score scale of 1600 with separate score for Essay.**

**COMMENT:** Changing the scale score confuses comparisons from the past to the future as was seen in previous scoring changes with the SAT.

Current

**SAT available on paper only.**

Redesigned

**SAT available in paper and digital forms.**

**COMMENT:** The testing source maintains freedom to change the questions dynamically in most of the currently proposed digital forms. The implications of online testing, especially in math are unknown and may impact student performance.