



## STUDENTS TO FACE NEWLY DESIGNED SAT

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*The SAT, a milestone for most high school students, will bring new challenges this Saturday for the estimated 300,000 members of the class of 2006, including harder math questions and a controversial essay.*

The College Board, which owns the SAT, says the new Standardized Aptitude Test will better reflect what students are learning in their coursework.

The changes, first announced three years ago, come in response to criticism from college admissions officers and high school guidance counselors.

“I think a lot of colleges are just looking at how much emotional and psychic energy [the SAT is] taking up,” Brad MacGowan, a guidance counselor at Newton North High School in suburban Boston, told the Associated Press. “They’re saying this should not be driving education.”

In 2001 the president of the University of California argued that the SAT was unfair to minority students and not a good predictor of a student’s true abilities. Expensive test-prep courses gave rich students an unfair advantage over poor students, he said.

The large university system says it will study the new exam over three years to determine any improvements.

### **The new test**

This year's SAT does not have analogies or quantitative comparisons, but it does have harder algebra II and geometry math questions and a greater stress on critical reading. A maximum score, once 1600, will now be 2400.

But perhaps the most significant change to test is the addition of a writing section with multiple choice questions on grammar and a student-written essay. Students will have 25 minutes to draft a persuasive essay -- without the help of a computer.

Trained high school and college instructors who teach courses that require a lot of writing will score essays using a holistic approach in which essays are judged by the total impression they create.

“We know that writing skills are important for academic and career success, and we hope that the addition of writing to the SAT will generate support for educators who emphasize writing,” said Photo Anagnostopoulos, senior vice president for the College Board.

## Critics

Critics like Mark Franek, an English teacher and dean of students at the William Penn Charter School in Philadelphia, disagree. The best writing is not created in less than half an hour under extreme pressure, Franek argues in a recent Christian Science Monitor editorial.

“Students would be better served by consistently reading the commentary section of the local newspaper -- and then periodically writing letters to the editor -- than by sitting through the painfully boring lesson plans that these changes to the SAT are likely to inspire,” he said.

Others think the new essay adds a subjective grading factor to what used to be a fully standardized and objective test.

“I don’t see how someone can judge the way I write and determine my score. ... People judge writing differently,” junior Samantha Deffler told New Jersey’s Courier News. “I’ve had different teachers that have judged my writing differently.”

## Supporters

But other test takers are excited about the changes in the SAT.

“I’m really bad at taking multiple-choice tests,” Katie Hardy, a sophomore, told the Courier News. “So I’m glad they’re putting a writing section on it, because I know I’m probably better at writing an essay than guessing on a multiple-choice question.”

Test preparation companies are happy with the changes too.

"The fear and anxiety associated with changes in the SAT are good for our business," Andy Lutz, vice president for program development at the Princeton Review, a leading test-preparation company, told The Washington Post. "It was a boon for our business the last time the SAT changed significantly 10 years ago, and we are seeing an equivalent boost this time around."

Students spend over \$310 million a year on test prep classes and materials.

## Avoiding the test altogether

For students who want to avoid the debate over the SAT’s predictive quality there are colleges that don’t require standardized tests. Bates College, a small liberal arts college in Maine, is one of them.

“When I’m stuck, I go back to the recommendations, to the student’s writing, to the interview,” admissions dean Wylie Mitchell said. “What do you want? A highly motivated student, or a good tester?”

--Compiled by Annie Schleicher for Online NewsHour Extra