

Retaking the test: strategies for success

By Jonathan Peters



If you have taken the SAT or ACT, you most likely have considered retaking it.

It is a commonly held belief that the more times you take the test, the better you will do. The statistics tend to agree; 55 percent of students who retake the ACT and SAT improve their scores, according to ACT and the College Board, the company that administers the SAT.

Of course, 35 percent of these students fared worse on a second SAT. Likewise, on the ACT, 23 percent lost points after a retake.

So how do you decide whether to retake the test? What strategies work best when studying for the test? I spoke to students between tests from across the country who are asking themselves these same questions and finding very different answers.

Students retake the test for many reasons. Victoria Ball, a junior from Chino Hills, Calif., is retaking the SAT in May. She feels more confident about the test the second time around. She was bothered by “the timing and all that” during the first test and kept asking herself, “Oh my gosh. When is this going to end?” This time she will be prepared for the test’s length.

Students often feel more comfortable retaking the SAT than the ACT. Colleges only look at the highest SAT scores. This process, called “super scoring,” is the norm among schools. Not all schools “super score” the ACT, although many are beginning to.

Kareem Nulan, an admissions officer from Trinity College in Hartford, Ct., explains his school uses a “cumulative score.” While the office’s policy is not to encourage retaking it, he does offer this advice, “The more you take it, the more confident you become.”

Everyone who retakes a test has a different approach to studying for it. Some high school students chose test prep courses, others simply study at home using practice tests or Internet resources.

Whether studying for the test on your own or with a course, make sure to learn from your mistakes. Check your score breakdown that includes explanations for each test question answered incorrectly or get a copy of the test and answer key. Reviewing this should be your first step when studying for the next test.

Seek out a study method that will help you the most and stick to it. A steady study plan, even 15 minutes of practice a night, is always better than random bursts of activity or waiting until the last minute.

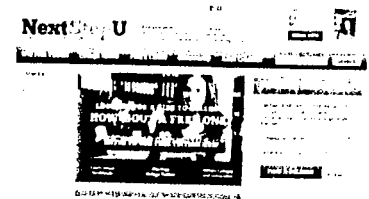
An important next step is to take a practice test. Rupa Sohmshtetty, an SAT and ACT tutor at Aim Academics in Farmington, Mich., writes in an email, “We recommend completing at least four or five practice tests.”

When taking a practice test, try to recreate the testing conditions when taking the practice test: allow no distractions, time yourself, even hire your mom to be proctor—as long as she promises not to chat.

The greatest advantage to retaking a test is experience. Practice may not make perfect, but it can help you achieve a much better score.



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