



Score Choice

How many times should you write your SAT?

Just over a year ago, the College Board introduced Score Choice – much to the delight of students worldwide, many of whom believed it had just made applying to American universities and colleges a lot easier.

Score Choice is a policy that relates to the SAT Reasoning Test—a test that students must write to gain admission to 80% of American colleges. In the past, the College Board (the non-profit organization that administers and runs the SAT) has stipulated that if a student writes the SAT repeatedly, all of her scores would necessarily be sent to colleges as part her admissions application. With the introduction of Score Choice just over a year ago, the situation has changed dramatically.

The College Board introduced the policy of “Score Choice” in order to provide students with the opportunity to choose which SAT scores they report on their college admissions applications.

Prima facie, Score Choice sounds like a great policy all around—a transformation in score reporting that ultimately favours the student. Consider the new scenario: you can now write, and rewrite, and rewrite, and rewrite some more...until you got the score that you want. In fact, the only limitation to your rewrites is the number of exam sessions each calendar year (there are only six in Canada).

In this new Score Choice world, you can, in theory, pick your highest scores from a plethora of possible SAT sittings. No one will ever know that you might have scored a 1600 (out of a possible 2400) on your first try given that you later scored 2200 (you only have to report the second score).

Not surprisingly, many students (and their parents) thought the new Score Choice policy had just made getting into American colleges a lot easier.

Unfortunately, Score Choice has created a more complicated admissions world than students first realize.





There are two reasons why.

The first is that Score Choice is a College Board policy, which individual colleges and universities can choose to opt in or out of. Individual universities and colleges devise yearly policies towards Score Choice reporting, and many of them have rejected Score Choice.

For instance, when Score Choice first appeared in late 2008, a number of Ivy League universities and top state schools boldly declared they wouldn't accept it. The University of Pennsylvania, Stanford, Columbia and Cornell all continued to require that students submit every SAT score on their exam transcript. Failure to do so disqualified a student's admission application.

This meant that students who plan to apply to multiple universities and colleges need to be careful about whether they chose to rewrite the exam at all, let alone rewrite it repeatedly. Multiple rewrites do not look good on an admissions application, and if your college rejects Score Choice, then you must report all scores (including your poor scores).

The second reason Score Choice has hindered some students' performances is that it has added to the mythical view that by simply rewriting the SAT (i.e. without doing anything to improve upon SAT-specific skills or test-taking

strategies), a student can increase her score. This is not the case. Studies analyzing the behaviour of students who rewrite standardized exams indicate that repeat exam sessions do not improve scores. In fact, among one-third of students, scores actually decrease over repeat sessions. This is because standardized exams are designed to make students score within a certain bandwidth. If a student's first score on the SAT is 1600, his second score won't be far off – especially if he does nothing to target his test-taking skills in the interim.

Learning SAT-specific test-taking skills is the only way to improve a SAT score. The best bet, therefore, is to learn these skills before you ever sit down to take the exam.

What to do?

Rather than worrying about whether you should rewrite the SAT, we recommend that students "Do it once, do it right!" To succeed on the SAT, start with these steps:

1. Plan to enrol in an SAT-specific training course with a Canadian provider that specializes in sending Canadian students abroad. Canadian companies know where the curriculum differs between American and Canadian high schools. These courses generally take 8 to 12 weeks, depending on your skills levels. So plan ahead!

2. Learn about the SAT-specific scoring penalty, which penalizes you for incorrect answers. When working with a Canadian preparation provider, they will analyze a student's score range to determine the degree to which this penalty is artificially hurting a student's score. If you are unaware of the scoring penalty, take some time looking at the College Board website (www.collegeboard.com) to learn more about it.
3. Plan to write your SAT at the end of Grade 10 or in Grade 11. Do not leave it until Grade 12. There is no Grade 12 content on the exam, and if you leave it until Grade 12, it might be too late to meet early admissions deadlines for your college.

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