

The SAT Score Vault

Every formula, Desmos shortcut, grammar rule and answer-trap that separates a 1200 from a 1500 — compressed into one file. Built from thousands of hours inside real Bluebook questions, not textbook theory.

150+AVG POINT GAIN
PER STUDENT**800**PERFECT SAT MATH
SCORED TWICE**7+**YEARS COACHING
SAT & MATH**50+**FORMULAS THE SAT
WON'T GIVE YOU

This is not a textbook. It's a weapons rack.

Most students lose points they already know how to earn. They lose them to slow methods, forgotten formulas, and answer choices engineered to look correct. This document fixes all three.

The test, in one table

98 QUESTIONS · 2H 14M

SECTION	MODULE 1	MODULE 2	TIME	SCORE
Reading & Writing	27 questions · 32 min	27 questions · 32 min difficulty set by Module 1	64 min	200–800
Math	22 questions · 35 min	22 questions · 35 min difficulty set by Module 1	70 min	200–800
Totals	98 questions · 4 modules · 10-minute break between sections		2h 14m	400–1600

How to use it

- 1 Read it once, cover to cover.** Roughly 40 minutes. Don't take notes yet — just find out what you didn't know you didn't know.
- 2 Mark the gaps.** Anything that made you pause is a live scoring leak. Circle it.
- 3 Drill one page per day** alongside real Bluebook practice tests. A trick you haven't used under a timer isn't yours yet.
- 4 Keep it open during untimed review.** When you miss a question, find the page that would have saved it.

Three rules that cost nothing

- **Never leave a blank.** No penalty for wrong answers. A guess is free expected value.
- **Use "Mark for Review."** You can move freely inside a module — but once you submit it, it's locked forever.
- **Calculator is always on.** Desmos is built into Bluebook and available on all 44 math questions.

The uncomfortable truth about "study harder"

The digital SAT gives you **71 seconds** per Reading & Writing question and **95 seconds** per Math question. At that speed, the test is not measuring how much you know. It's measuring how fast you can recognise what you know.

That's why formula recall and pattern recognition beat raw effort. A student who recognises a question type in 5 seconds has 90 seconds to solve. A student who has to think about what's being asked has 60. Same brain. Different score.

What's inside

- Part 1 — Math** Reference sheet gaps, the full formula vault, 12 Desmos weapons, backsolving, and the 6 traps
- Part 2 — English** The punctuation decision tree, 10 grammar rules, transitions, synthesis, and how wrong answers are built
- Part 3 — Test day** Module-by-module pacing and the final 48-hour checklist

Adaptive: why Module 1 is worth more

Your Module 1 performance decides whether Module 2 is the hard form or the easy form — and the easy form comes with a score ceiling. A student on the easier path can answer everything correctly and still land far below their potential. Treat Module 1 as the real exam. Slow down, verify, and bank every easy point.

01

SAT Math

44 questions. 70 minutes. Roughly 70% of them are Algebra and Advanced Math — which is exactly where the test gives you no formulas at all.

IN THIS PART

01 What the reference sheet gives you free

03 12 Desmos moves that erase algebra

05 Sum/product of roots and other pattern keys

02 The 40+ formulas it doesn't

04 Backsolving & plugging in numbers

06 The 6 traps that eat perfect scores

The reference sheet is a trap of omission

Bluebook gives you an on-screen formula sheet on every math question. Students see it and relax. Here's the problem: the sheet is geometry only — and geometry is about 15% of the section.

GIVEN FREE What's actually on the sheet

Circle	$A = \pi r^2 \cdot C = 2\pi r$
Rectangle	$A = lw$
Triangle	$A = \frac{1}{2}bh$
Pythagorean	$c^2 = a^2 + b^2$
Special right $\triangle$	30-60-90 $\rightarrow x, x\sqrt{3}, 2x$ 45-45-90 $\rightarrow s, s, s\sqrt{2}$
Rect. prism	$V = lwh$
Cylinder	$V = \pi r^2 h$
Sphere	$V = \frac{4}{3}\pi r^3$
Cone	$V = \frac{1}{3}\pi r^2 h$
Pyramid	$V = \frac{1}{3}lwh$
Angle facts	360° in a circle $\cdot 2\pi$ radians in a circle $\cdot 180^\circ$ in a triangle

Read this twice

Zero algebra formulas. Zero function formulas. Zero statistics formulas. No quadratic formula, no slope, no vertex, no circle equation, no exponential growth, no percent change, no trig ratios. Roughly **85% of the math section is formula-free territory** — and the next four pages are exactly that territory.

MISSING

What students assume is on the sheet — and isn't

- Quadratic formula & the discriminant
- Slope, midpoint, distance
- Vertex form and the axis of symmetry
- Equation of a circle in the xy-plane
- SOHCAHTOA and the sine-cosine identity
- Arc length and sector area
- Exponential growth / decay / compound interest
- Percent change, mean, median, probability
- Interior angle sum of a polygon

The one-second habit that pays

Before test day, open the reference sheet in Bluebook and look at it once. Students lose 30–60 seconds mid-test hunting for a formula that was never there. Knowing the sheet's boundaries is itself a time-saving trick.

Algebra & Linear Relationships

~35% of the section

Memorise these to instant recall. Not "I could derive it" — instant. Every second spent reconstructing a formula is a second stolen from a harder question later in the module.

Lines

Slope	$m = (y_2 - y_1) / (x_2 - x_1)$
-------	---------------------------------

Slope-intercept	$y = mx + b$
-----------------	--------------

Point-slope	$y - y_1 = m(x - x_1)$
-------------	------------------------

Standard form	$Ax + By = C$
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From standard form	slope = $-A/B$ · x-int = C/A · y-int = C/B
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Parallel	$m_1 = m_2$
----------	-------------

Perpendicular	$m_1 \cdot m_2 = -1$
---------------	----------------------

Midpoint	$((x_1+x_2)/2, (y_1+y_2)/2)$
----------	------------------------------

Distance	$\sqrt{(x_2-x_1)^2 + (y_2-y_1)^2}$
----------	------------------------------------

Systems — the highest-frequency shortcut on the test

Given $a_1x + b_1y = c_1$ and $a_2x + b_2y = c_2$, don't solve. Compare ratios:

THE QUESTION SAYS

THE CONDITION IS

Exactly one solution

$a_1/a_2 \neq b_1/b_2$

No solution (parallel)

$a_1/a_2 = b_1/b_2 \neq c_1/c_2$

Infinitely many (same line)

$a_1/a_2 = b_1/b_2 = c_1/c_2$

Plain-English version: "No solution" means same slope, different intercept. "Infinitely many" means the two equations are the same line in disguise — one is a multiple of the other. This single idea appears on essentially every administered test.

Translating word problems, fast

- **Slope** = the per-unit rate ("each", "per", "every")
- **y-intercept** = the starting value / fixed fee / initial amount
- "is" → = · "of" → × · "per" → ÷
- "at most" → ≤ · "at least" → ≥

Absolute value & inequalities

$ x = a$	$x = a$ or $x = -a$
-----------	---------------------

$ x - c < a$	$-a < x - c < a$ (a band around c)
---------------	------------------------------------

$ x - c > a$	$x - c > a$ or $x - c < -a$
---------------	-----------------------------

Multiply/divide by a negative	flip the inequality sign
-------------------------------	--------------------------

SHORTCUT Perpendicular? Flip and negate

When two lines must be perpendicular, don't compute. If a line has slope $3/4$, the perpendicular slope is $-4/3$. Flip the fraction, change the sign. If the given line is horizontal ($y = 5$), the perpendicular is vertical ($x = k$) — and vertical lines have **undefined** slope, not zero. That distinction is a favourite trap in the harder Module 2.

Advanced Math

~35% of the section

Quadratics, polynomials, exponentials and function behaviour. This is where the hard Module 2 lives, and where the biggest point swings happen.

The three forms of a quadratic — and what each hands you

FORM

READ OFF INSTANTLY

$$y = ax^2 + bx + c$$

$$y\text{-intercept} = c$$

$$y = a(x - h)^2 + k$$

$$\text{vertex} = (h, k) \cdot \text{min/max value} = k$$

$$y = a(x - r_1)(x - r_2)$$

$$\text{roots} = r_1, r_2 \text{ (x-intercepts)}$$

The question tells you which form to use. Asked for the minimum? You need vertex form. Asked where it crosses the x-axis? Factored form. Asked for the y-intercept? Standard form. Convert deliberately — don't just start expanding.

Quadratic essentials

$$\text{Quadratic formula} \quad x = \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a}$$

$$\text{Discriminant } D \quad D = b^2 - 4ac$$

$$D > 0 \quad \text{two distinct real solutions}$$

$$D = 0 \quad \text{exactly one real solution (tangent to x-axis)}$$

$$D < 0 \quad \text{no real solutions}$$

$$\text{Axis of symmetry / vertex } x \quad x = -b / 2a$$

$$\text{Vertex from the roots} \quad x = (r_1 + r_2) / 2$$

SHORTCUT Sum & product of roots

For $ax^2 + bx + c = 0$: sum = $-b/a$ and product = c/a . Any question that says "the sum of the solutions is..." or gives you both roots' relationship is answerable in ten seconds without factoring anything.

Exponents & radicals

$$\text{Multiply} \quad x^a \cdot x^b = x^{a+b}$$

$$\text{Divide} \quad x^a / x^b = x^{a-b}$$

$$\text{Power of a power} \quad (x^a)^b = x^{a \cdot b}$$

$$\text{Negative exponent} \quad x^{-a} = 1 / x^a$$

$$\text{Fractional exponent} \quad x^{a/b} = \sqrt[b]{x^a}$$

$$\text{Zero exponent} \quad x^0 = 1 \quad (x \neq 0)$$

Factoring patterns worth recognising on sight

$$\text{Difference of squares} \quad a^2 - b^2 = (a+b)(a-b)$$

$$\text{Perfect square} \quad (a \pm b)^2 = a^2 \pm 2ab + b^2$$

$$\text{Difference of cubes} \quad a^3 - b^3 = (a-b)(a^2 + ab + b^2)$$

Growth & decay models

$$\text{Growth / decay} \quad y = a(1 \pm r)^t$$

$$\text{Compounded } n\%/\text{year} \quad A = P(1 + r/n)^{nt}$$

$$\text{Half-life } h \quad y = a(\frac{1}{2})^{t/h}$$

$$\text{Doubling time } d \quad y = a(2)^{t/d}$$

Read the base, not the story. In $y = a(b)^t$: if $b > 1$ it grows; if $0 < b < 1$ it decays. A base of 1.07 means +7% per period. A base of 0.88 means -12% per period. Students constantly misread 0.88 as "88% decrease."

Function transformations of $f(x)$

$$f(x) + k \rightarrow \text{up } k \quad f(x) - k \rightarrow \text{down } k$$

$$f(x + h) \rightarrow \text{left } h \quad f(x - h) \rightarrow \text{right } h$$

$$-f(x) \rightarrow \text{reflect over x-axis} \quad f(-x) \rightarrow \text{reflect over y-axis}$$

Horizontal shifts are counter-intuitive: $f(x + h)$ moves *left*.

Polynomials: the factor & remainder theorems

- If $f(a) = 0$, then $(x - a)$ is a factor and a is a root and $(a, 0)$ is on the graph. All the same fact.
- When $f(x)$ is divided by $(x - a)$, the remainder is $f(a)$.
- A root of **even** multiplicity touches the x-axis and turns back; **odd** multiplicity crosses through.

Data, Geometry & Trigonometry

~30% combined

Fewer questions, but the highest ratio of "I knew that, I just blanked." These are pure recall points.

Percent, rates & statistics

Percent change	$(\text{new} - \text{old}) / \text{old} \times 100$
Increase by r%	multiply by $(1 + r)$
Decrease by r%	multiply by $(1 - r)$
"x is what % of y"	$x / y \times 100$
Mean	$\text{sum} \div \text{count}$
The move that matters	sum = mean $\times$ count
Probability	$\text{favourable} \div \text{total}$
Distance	$d = rt$
Density	$\text{mass} \div \text{volume}$

SHORTCUT Every "average" question is a sum question

"Mean of 6 numbers is 14; a 7th is added and the mean becomes 15. What was added?" $\rightarrow 6 \times 14 = 84$, $7 \times 15 = 105$, **answer 21**. Convert means to sums immediately.

Standard deviation — never calculated, always compared

You are never asked to compute SD, only to say which set has the larger one. Answer: the one more spread out from its mean. Same logic for mean vs median — an outlier drags the mean toward it and leaves the median roughly put.

Study design — three sentences, always the same

- **Random sample** $\rightarrow$ you may generalise to the whole population.
- **Random assignment** to groups $\rightarrow$ you may claim cause.
- **Bigger sample** $\rightarrow$ smaller margin of error. Nothing else changes it.

Circles in the xy-plane

Standard equation	$(x - h)^2 + (y - k)^2 = r^2$
Centre / radius	centre (h, k) $\cdot$ radius r
Given expanded?	Complete the square on x and on y

Arcs, sectors & radians

Arc length (degrees)	$(\theta/360) \cdot 2\pi r$
Sector area (degrees)	$(\theta/360) \cdot \pi r^2$
Arc length (radians)	$s = r\theta$
Sector area (radians)	$A = \frac{1}{2}r^2\theta$
Degree $\leftrightarrow$ radian	$\times \pi/180$ $\times 180/\pi$
Inscribed angle	$= \frac{1}{2}$ the central angle on the same arc

Triangles & polygons

Interior angle sum, n-gon	$(n - 2) \cdot 180^\circ$
Similar figures, ratio k	sides k $\cdot$ areas k^2 $\cdot$ volumes k^3
Triangle inequality	$ a - b < c < a + b$
Pythagorean triples	3-4-5 $\cdot$ 5-12-13 $\cdot$ 8-15-17 $\cdot$ 7-24-25

Trigonometry — all of it

SOH CAH TOA	$\sin = O/H$ $\cdot$ $\cos = A/H$ $\cdot$ $\tan = O/A$
The identity they love	$\sin(x^\circ) = \cos(90^\circ - x^\circ)$
Pythagorean identity	$\sin^2 x + \cos^2 x = 1$
$\tan$ in terms of $\sin$, $\cos$	$\tan x = \sin x / \cos x$
Why that matters	If $\sin A = 3/5$ and $A + B = 90^\circ$, then $\cos B = 3/5$ instantly — no triangle drawn.

12 Desmos moves that delete the algebra

Desmos is built into Bluebook and available on every single math question. Most students use it as a calculator. High scorers use it as a solver. Each move below turns a two-minute problem into a twenty-second one.

The syntax that trips everyone up

In Desmos, subscripts are typed with an underscore: `x_1` renders as x_1 . Exponents use the caret: `x^2`. Curly braces group an exponent longer than one character: `ab^{x_1}`. Get these three right and every regression works first time.

1 Systems of equations → graph both, click the intersection

Type both equations on separate lines exactly as written. Click where the curves meet; Desmos labels the coordinates. Works for linear–linear, linear–quadratic, and quadratic–quadratic alike.

2 Any single-variable equation → split it in two

For a messy equation, put the left side in one line and the right side in another, then read the x-value of the intersection. Or just type the whole equation with one variable and read the x-intercepts.

`y = 3(x-4)^2 - 7 | y = 2x + 11 → intersection = the solution`

3 Roots, vertex, y-intercept → click the grey dots

Graph any function and Desmos marks every x-intercept, y-intercept, minimum and maximum. Click one and it gives you exact coordinates. No factoring, no $-b/2a$.

4 Circles → type them directly

Desmos accepts $(x-3)^2 + (y+2)^2 = 25$ as-is, and even the ugly expanded form $x^2 + y^2 - 6x + 4y = 12$. Graph it, look at the picture, read the centre and radius. Completing the square becomes optional.

5 The tilde (~) — regression, the single most powerful key on the SAT

Make a table (+ → Table), enter your points as `x_1 / y_1`, then on a new line type one of:

`y_1 ~ mx_1 + b` — linear: m and b

`y_1 ~ ax_1^2 + bx_1 + c` — quadratic

`y_1 ~ ab^{x_1}` — exponential: a and b

Desmos hands you every coefficient. Any question that gives you a table of values and asks for the equation, or asks you to predict a value, is now a 20-second problem.

6 Sliders for "how many solutions" and "for what value of k..."

Type the equation with a letter in it. Desmos offers to add a slider. Drag it and watch when the graphs touch (one solution), cross twice (two), or miss entirely (none). Click the slider's gear icon to set the step to 0.1 or 0.01 for precision.

Desmos moves 7–12, and when to reach for each

The first six moves cover most of Module 1. These six are what separate a 700 from an 800 — they attack the question types that are genuinely slow to do by hand.

7 Equivalent expressions → graph both and look

Asked which expression is equivalent to another? Graph the original and graph a candidate. If they are the same curve, they're equivalent. If any part diverges, they aren't.

8 Systems of inequalities → read the overlap

Type the inequalities with $<$, $>$, $\leq$, $\geq$. Desmos shades each region. The answer point must sit inside the darker overlap. Test the four answer choices visually.

9 Statistics functions → type them literally

```
mean(4,8,15,16,23) · median(...) · stdev(...) · total(...)
```

Faster and safer than adding a long list by hand.

10 Two unknown constants → solve as a system

If a problem gives two conditions and two unknowns (say a and b), write both as equations in x and y , graph, and take the intersection. Rename mentally at the end.

11 Function notation → define $f(x)$ once, then evaluate

Type $f(x) = 2x^2 - 5x + 1$ on one line, then $f(7)$ on the next. Desmos prints the value. Perfect for nested questions like $f(g(3))$.

12 Answer-check every multiple-choice question you solved by hand

If you have 15 seconds spare, plug your answer back in through Desmos. This is the cheapest insurance policy on the exam, and it catches nearly every arithmetic slip.

Which move for which question stem

WHEN THE QUESTION SAYS...

REACH FOR

"the solution to the system of equations"

Move 1 — graph both, click the intersection

"what is the value of x "

Move 2 — split into two graphs

"the minimum / maximum value of the function"

Move 3 — graph it, click the turning point

"the table shows... which equation models the data"

Move 5 — table + tilde regression

"for what value of k does the equation have..."

Move 6 — slider, watch the graphs touch

"which expression is equivalent to..."

Move 7 — graph both, compare the curves

One condition — and one warning

Desmos fluency takes roughly **2–3 hours of deliberate practice** to become automatic, and it must be automatic before test day. Fumbling with syntax under a 35-minute clock costs more than it saves. Practise at desmos.com/calculator on real questions until your fingers know the keystrokes without your brain participating.

The warning: Desmos does not read word problems. It cannot tell you which quantity the question is asking for. Every move above assumes you have already translated the problem correctly — and that translation is still the skill that decides your score.

Backsolving, plugging in, and the six ways students bleed points

When Desmos doesn't fit, these two techniques do. Then: the error patterns that cost high-scorers 30–60 points they had already earned.

TECHNIQUE Backsolving — use the answers as data

The SAT lists numerical answers in ascending order. That's a gift.

1. Start with choice B or C (the middle).
2. Plug it into the problem's conditions.
3. Too big? Go down. Too small? Go up.

You will usually find the answer in two attempts. Best for: "what is the value of x ", word problems with awkward setups, and anything where writing the equation is harder than testing a number.

TECHNIQUE Plugging in numbers

When the answer choices contain letters, invent a value.

1. Pick a small, easy number. Use 2 or 3.
2. **Never use 0 or 1** — they make different expressions look identical. For percent problems, always use 100.
3. Work out the numerical answer, then test all four choices for a match.
4. If two choices both match, pick a second number and retest only those two.

Which technique when?

Numbers in the answers	Backsolve
Letters in the answers	Plug in numbers
Graph, table or data given	Desmos
"Which is equivalent to..."	Desmos or plug in
Type-in (no choices)	Solve properly — no shortcut exists

The six traps

TRAP 1 Solving for the wrong thing. You found x . The question asked for $2x + 1$, or for $x + y$, or for "how many more". The SAT deliberately includes the value of x as a wrong answer choice. Re-read the final sentence of the question before you click.

TRAP 2 Units. Minutes given, hours asked. Centimetres given, metres asked. Per week given, per year asked. Circle every unit in the question stem as you read it.

TRAP 3 Extraneous solutions. Squaring both sides of a radical equation, or clearing denominators in a rational one, can manufacture solutions that don't work. Always substitute back.

TRAP 4 "Figure not drawn to scale." When you see that note, stop trusting the picture. Redraw it to match the actual numbers given — the distortion is intentional.

TRAP 5 Type-in formatting. A correct answer entered wrongly scores zero. See the rules below.

TRAP 6 Rushing Module 1. Every early question is worth the same as a hard one — and it also decides which Module 2 you get. Speeding through the easy half to "save time for the hard part" is the single most expensive habit in SAT Math.

Student-produced response (type-in) rules

- Roughly one in four math questions is a type-in. No answer choices.
- Negatives are allowed. Up to 5 characters for a positive answer, 6 including the minus sign.
- Fractions and decimals both accepted. No mixed numbers — enter $5/4$ or 1.25 , never $1 \frac{1}{4}$.
- No commas in large numbers — type 2500, not 2,500.
- No % or currency symbols. If the answer is 40%, enter 40.
- Repeating decimals: fill the whole field — $2/3$ becomes .6666 or .6667, never .67.
- If more than one value is correct, enter only one.

02

SAT English

54 questions. 64 minutes. Every question has its own short passage of 25–150 words — which means this section rewards a system, not a reading habit.

IN THIS PART

01 The fixed order of every module

03 10 grammar rules that cover the section

05 The underline method for synthesis

02 The punctuation decision tree

04 Transitions in four buckets

06 How wrong answers are manufactured

Reading & Writing is the most predictable section on the test

The order never changes. Within each module the four domains appear in the same sequence, and inside each domain the questions run easiest to hardest. Knowing the map tells you exactly where you are and how much time you should be spending.

ORDER	DOMAIN	SHARE	WHAT IT ACTUALLY TESTS
1st	Craft & Structure	~28% 13–15 Q	Words in Context · Text Structure & Purpose · Cross-Text Connections
2nd	Information & Ideas	~26% 12–14 Q	Central Ideas & Details · Command of Evidence (textual and quantitative) · Inferences
3rd	Standard English Conventions	~26% 11–15 Q	Boundaries (punctuation between clauses) · Form, Structure & Sense (grammar)
4th	Expression of Ideas	~20% 8–12 Q	Transitions · Rhetorical Synthesis (the bullet-point questions)

Why the order is a strategy, not trivia

- The first few questions of each domain are the easy ones. When a new domain begins, difficulty resets to low. **Never rush the start of a domain.**
- The last one or two of each domain are the hardest. If you're stuck there, that's expected — flag it and move on to the domain reset ahead.
- Conventions questions are the one exception: they're ordered by difficulty only, with punctuation and grammar types mixed together.

The passage format changes everything

One question per passage. Passages are 25–150 words. There is no "read the whole thing and answer ten questions." You are doing 54 tiny, self-contained tasks back to back.

So the winning method is **per-question, not per-passage**: read the question first, then read the passage knowing what you're hunting for.

The universal method — four steps, every single question

- 1 Read the question stem first.** Know the job before you read the text.
- 2 Read the passage once, properly.** These are 60 words. Reading them twice is faster than skimming them four times.
- 3 Answer in your own words before you look at the choices.** A prediction makes you immune to attractive wrong answers.
- 4 Eliminate, don't select.** Find the flaw in three choices. The survivor is the answer — even if it feels plain.

The punctuation decision tree

Punctuation is the largest single question type in Standard English Conventions. Almost all of it collapses into one question: **is each side of the blank a complete sentence?** Answer that and the choices eliminate themselves. Stop reading for what "sounds right" — it doesn't work.

Step 1 — Label both sides

Complete (independent clause) = has a subject and a verb and could stand alone as a sentence.

Incomplete (fragment) = cannot stand alone. Usually starts with *because, although, since, while, when, if, which, that* — or is just a list or a phrase.

COMPLETE + COMPLETE

You need a strong break. Legal options:

Period .

Semicolon ;

Comma + FANBOYS , and / but / or / so / for / nor / yet

Colon : — only if the second explains or defines the first

Dash — — only if the second explains or dramatises the first

COMPLETE + INCOMPLETE

Colon, dash, or comma — depending on the job. Use a colon when what follows is a list, explanation or definition. Use a dash for an abrupt add-on. **Never a semicolon.**

INCOMPLETE + COMPLETE

A comma. ("Although the data was clear, the committee hesitated.")

Students constantly omit this comma; the SAT constantly offers that omission as a wrong answer.

INCOMPLETE + INCOMPLETE

Usually no punctuation at all. "No change" and "no punctuation" are correct far more often than students expect. Punctuation is not decoration.

The Period Test

A semicolon is always interchangeable with a period. So: replace the semicolon with a period and read both halves aloud. If both are complete sentences, the semicolon is legal. If either half limps, it isn't. This one test resolves most semicolon questions in three seconds.

The Namely Test

A colon works when you could substitute the word "namely" or "here's what I mean." The part before a colon must always be a complete sentence. The part after does not have to be.

Non-essential information: the deletion test

Cover the phrase between the punctuation marks. Does the sentence still make complete sense and keep its meaning?

- **Yes** → non-essential → set it off with a matched pair: two commas, two dashes, or two parentheses.
- **No** → essential → no punctuation at all.
- The shortcut tell: *that* introduces essential info → no comma. *which* introduces non-essential info → comma before it. "The study that we ran" vs "The study, which we ran,"

The four rules that are never broken

- 01 Never a semicolon before a list. "three proposals; the plan, the strategy, the schedule" is wrong. Use a colon.
- 02 Never a comma splice. Two complete sentences joined by a comma alone is always wrong. "She finished the experiment, she published the results." X
- 03 Never mix a dash with a comma around the same interruption. Two dashes, or two commas. Not one of each.
- 04 Never a comma between a subject and its verb. No matter how long the subject is.

Ten grammar rules. That's the whole syllabus.

Beyond punctuation, Standard English Conventions tests a small, fixed list. There is no hidden eleventh rule. Learn these ten and the domain becomes free points.

1 Subject-verb agreement: cross out the middle

The SAT hides the subject behind long phrases. Delete every prepositional phrase and every interrupter, then check. "The collection ~~of rare manuscripts donated by three alumni~~ is housed..." Also watch inverted sentences: "There are several reasons..." — the subject comes after the verb.

2 Pronoun agreement & ambiguity

A singular noun takes a singular pronoun. Collective nouns (team, company, committee, jury) are singular on the SAT. If a pronoun could refer to two different nouns, the choice that names the noun explicitly is usually correct — the SAT punishes ambiguity.

3 Apostrophes: three separate jobs

Singular possessive: the scientist's theory
Plural possessive: the scientists' theories
Plural only (no possession): the scientists — never an apostrophe
its = belonging to · it's = it is. its' does not exist.
their (possessive) · there (place) · they're (they are)

4 Verb tense: match the neighbourhood

There is always a time marker somewhere in the passage — *in 1897, currently, will soon, since 2010*. The verb must agree with it. Don't choose the fanciest tense; choose the consistent one.

5 Modifiers must touch what they modify

Whatever comes immediately after an introductory phrase is what that phrase is describing. "Walking through the museum, the paintings impressed her." — the paintings weren't walking. "Walking through the museum, she was impressed by the paintings."

6 Parallel structure in lists and comparisons

Items in a series must share a form. "reading, writing, and to solve problems" → "reading, writing, and solving problems." Same for correlative pairs: *not only... but also..., either... or..., both... and...*

7 Logical comparison: compare like with like

"The population of Delhi is larger than Mumbai." — that compares a population to a city. "...larger than **that of** Mumbai." Look for *that of* and *those of*.

8 Countable vs uncountable

fewer / number / many for things you can count. *less / amount / much* for things you can't. *between* for two, *among* for three or more.

9 Verb form after a "who/which/that" clause

The verb inside the clause agrees with the noun the clause describes, not with the main subject. "He is one of the students who **have** finished." (the students have)

10 Concision wins ties

If two choices are both grammatically correct and mean the same thing, the SAT wants the shorter one. Redundancy is an error: "annual yearly report", "returned back", "the reason is because".

Notice what is not on this list

No essay. No vocabulary memorisation. No obscure style rules. No "which sounds more elegant." The digital SAT tests a closed set of mechanical rules — which is exactly why this domain is **the fastest place on the entire exam to gain 40–60 points**.

Transitions and Rhetorical Synthesis

These two make up Expression of Ideas — roughly 8–12 questions per test. Both have a mechanical method that almost no self-taught student uses.

Transitions: sort into four buckets, then pick

The SAT gives you four transitions from different logical families. Only one family fits. So classify first, and the answer usually reveals itself before you've read all four choices.

BUCKET	SIGNALS
1 • CONTINUE same direction	also, moreover, furthermore, in addition, similarly, likewise
2 • CONTRAST reverses direction	however, nevertheless, nonetheless, on the other hand, in contrast, conversely, still, by contrast
3 • CAUSE → EFFECT this led to that	therefore, thus, consequently, as a result, hence, accordingly
4 • ILLUSTRATE zooms in or restates	for example, for instance, specifically, in other words, in fact, indeed

The method

1. Cover the answer choices. Physically, mentally, whatever it takes.
2. Read the sentence before the blank. Summarise it in three words.
3. Read the sentence after. Summarise it in three words.
4. Name the relationship yourself: same, opposite, result, or example.
5. Only now, look at the choices. Pick the one from your bucket.

The three transition traps

- **Picking what sounds smooth.** "However" sounds sophisticated everywhere. It's only correct when the logic actually reverses.
- **Reading only the sentence before.** The relationship needs both sides. Always read forward.
- **Confusing "in fact" with "for example."** *In fact* intensifies the same claim; *for example* supplies an instance of it.

Rhetorical Synthesis: the underline method

You get a set of bullet-point notes and a question ending with a stated goal — "...wants to emphasise a similarity", "...wants to introduce the study to an audience unfamiliar with it". Students read the bullets first and drown. Do the opposite.

- 1 Skip the bullets entirely on the first pass**
Jump straight to the question stem and read the goal.

- 2 Underline the goal's key words**
Every goal has two or three load-bearing words. "Emphasise the difference in size between the two species." Those words are your filter.

- 3 Now read the bullets, looking only for what serves the goal**
Most of the information is irrelevant by design.

- 4 Test each choice against the goal, not against the facts**
Every wrong answer is usually factually accurate. That's the trick. Accuracy isn't the test — doing the stated job is.

The one sentence that fixes most synthesis mistakes

"Is this choice true?" is the wrong question. **"Does this choice do what the goal asked?"** is the right one. Ask the second question and this becomes one of the most reliably scoreable question types on the exam.

The reading question types, one method each

Every remaining question type has a specific mechanical approach. Match the method to the stem and the guesswork disappears.

Words in Context

Method: Cover the choices. Read the sentence, and the one before it. Decide the charge first — is the missing word positive, negative or neutral? Then write your own word in the blank. Then match.

Trap: the hardest-looking word is usually a decoy. The SAT tests common words in less common senses far more often than it tests rare vocabulary. If three choices are ordinary and one is exotic, the exotic one is rarely right.

Text Structure & Purpose

Method: Ask "what is this passage *doing*?", not "what is it about?" Choices here begin with verbs — describes, challenges, illustrates, contrasts, proposes. Check the verb first; if it's wrong, the rest doesn't matter. Half are eliminated on word one.

Central Ideas & Details

Method: After reading, state the main point in one short sentence before looking. **Trap:** wrong answers are usually true details from the passage that are too narrow. A detail is not a main idea. If a choice only covers one sentence of a five-sentence passage, eliminate it.

Inferences

Method: These say "which most logically completes the text." The answer is the conclusion the passage *forces*, not the one that's merely plausible. Find the gap it builds toward — especially after *however*, *although*, *suggests*, *therefore* — then take the smallest, safest step. Never bring in outside knowledge.

Command of Evidence — Textual

Method: The question names a specific claim or hypothesis. The correct answer must clear two bars: it must be consistent with the passage, *and* it must directly strengthen or weaken that specific claim. Most wrong answers clear the first bar and fail the second — they're relevant to the topic but not to the claim. Re-read the claim, word for word, before you test each choice.

Command of Evidence — Quantitative

Method — in this order:

1. Read the title of the graph.
2. Read both axis labels and their units. This is where most errors are born.
3. Read the claim in the question.
4. Eliminate any choice that misreads the data, then eliminate any that reads it correctly but doesn't support the claim.

Cross-Text Connections

Method: Before touching the choices, write two mini-summaries — Text 1 thinks: _____ (3 words) · Text 2 thinks: _____ (3 words). Then name the relationship: agrees · disagrees · qualifies · extends · offers an alternative explanation. Only then read the choices. **Trap:** answers that describe Text 1 accurately but misrepresent Text 2, or that overstate the disagreement into total opposition when the second author only partly objects.

How wrong answers are manufactured — the four archetypes

Every incorrect choice on the SAT is built deliberately. Once you can name the flaw, elimination becomes fast and certain.

TYPE 1 Half right, half wrong. The first half is a perfect paraphrase. The second half adds something the passage never said. Students commit after reading the first six words. Read every choice to its final word.

TYPE 2 True but irrelevant. Accurate about the passage, but it doesn't answer *this* question. Extremely common in Command of Evidence.

TYPE 3 Too extreme. Watch for *always*, *never*, *all*, *none*, *proves*, *must*, *entirely*, *impossible*. Academic writing hedges; SAT answers hedge with it. Softer language (*suggests*, *may*, *tends to*, *some*) is usually the safer pick.

TYPE 4 Out of scope. Introduces a comparison, cause or category the text never raised. If you have to supply a fact from your own knowledge to justify a choice, it's wrong.

Pacing, and the last 48 hours

Knowing the content is necessary. Spending it correctly across four separately-timed modules is what converts knowledge into a score.

Pacing targets — memorise these four numbers

MODULE	BUDGET	SPEND FAST ON	SPEND SLOW ON
R&W · 27 Q / 32 min	~71 sec	Words in Context and Conventions — target 30–45 sec each	Rhetorical Synthesis, Cross-Text, Quantitative Evidence — these can afford 90–110 sec
Math · 22 Q / 35 min	~95 sec	Questions 1–11 — target 45–60 sec each and bank the surplus	Questions 12–22 — the saved minutes live here

The 90-second rule

If you have made no real progress on a question after 90 seconds, you are not about to. Mark for Review, move on, and come back with fresh eyes. Every question in a module is worth exactly the same. Trading one hard question for three easy ones you never reached is the worst deal on the exam — and it is the most common way students lose 50 points.

The last-two-minutes protocol

- Open the review panel and confirm zero blanks. Guess on anything empty.
- Return to your flagged questions in order of how close you were.
- Do not second-guess answers you were confident about. First instincts on questions you understood are right far more often than revisions.

The 48-hour checklist

TWO DAYS BEFORE

- Complete your last full Bluebook practice test. No new material after this point.
- Re-read this document once, end to end.
- Confirm Bluebook is installed, updated and logged in on the device you'll use.
- Print or download your admission ticket.

THE NIGHT BEFORE

- Charge your device to 100%. Pack the charger anyway.
- Pack: admission ticket, photo ID, charger, backup calculator, water, snack for the break.
- Review only your error log and the formula vault. Nothing new.
- Sleep. It outperforms every extra hour of revision at this stage.

TEST MORNING

- Eat something with protein. The test is 3+ hours with one short break.
- Arrive early enough that check-in isn't rushed.
- Warm up your brain with 2–3 easy practice questions in the car. Don't walk in cold.
- Use the full 10-minute break: stand, walk, drink water, eat.

Where the next 100 points actually come from

Not from more content. You now have essentially every formula, rule and shortcut the digital SAT can test — that part is finished. The remaining gap is **error diagnosis**: knowing which of your mistakes are careless, which are conceptual, which are timing, and which are trap-recognition — and then attacking each one differently.

That's the work that a document can't do for you, and it's the work that a good coach does with you in about six weeks.

You have the map. Now get the guide.



Everything in this document is what I teach in the first two weeks. What follows is the part that actually moves scores: diagnosing exactly where your points are leaking, and closing those specific gaps with targeted practice — question by question, week by week.

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