

much
smarter

**Five Things the “Bad Test Taker”
MUST DO to Master the SAT/ACT**

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Are you having a hard time with the SAT or ACT?

Do you get good or excellent grades in most or all of your courses, but get scores you don't even recognize when you take a practice SAT or ACT—or, even worse, when you take the real thing?

Are you struggling to understand why you can be so good in some areas and so bad in others?

Are you frustrated because you don't know how to approach the whole experience of standardized testing?

Are you anxious because you fear that your struggles with the SAT or ACT will prevent you from getting into the kind of college you would love to attend?

Well, you're not alone!

It turns out many, many students (way more than you'd think) excel in school but struggle on standardized tests like the SAT or ACT.

And I've got some good news for you:

NO student is doomed to frustration and failure on the SAT or ACT.

Here are the **five things** that you must do to shift from frustration and fear to confidence and mastery on the SAT / ACT!

1) Let go of the false belief that you “can't do” standardized tests.

Do you imagine that you've inherited a gene that codes you as "no good at standardized tests?"

We had a student named Jack who barely got any questions wrong in practice but did much worse when he took an actual test. When we asked him, "What do you think is happening?" he responded, "I'm bad at standardized tests."

So we asked him whether he thought he inherited a gene that made him bad at standardized tests. He laughed—it was such a silly idea! Once Jack saw the idea as ridiculous, he was able to free himself from that false belief, and to get a standardized test score that matched his brilliance in practice.

Here's another one: We had a student named Harrison, a straight A student. Before we started working together, his mom had taken him to a psychologist, who made a “diagnosis” that predicted that Harrison would be bad at standardized tests. Harrison wound up getting a 33 on his ACT—better than 98% of test takers that year.

Almost everyone, by the time they are sixteen or seventeen years old, develop fixed ideas about what they can and cannot do. What do so many say? "I suck at math," or "I can't write," or "I'm no good at speaking in front of a group," or "I can't play soccer."

It's all around you—*I can't, I can't, I can't.*

What do these ideas have in common? They are false beliefs! You can weaken any false belief by adopting some fresh thinking

The reason it *might seem* that you're great at school and bad at standardized tests is simply that those are two different games. You've gotten good at the game of getting grades in school—you have not yet learned how to get good at the SAT or ACT.

That's the key—you just haven't learned how yet!

It's said that insanity is doing what you did before and expecting a different result. So, first and foremost—stop telling yourself that you are bad at the SAT and ACT and make a new start.

2) Give yourself enough time to succeed.

Some games take less time to learn; some take more.

This is extremely helpful to remember. Once you understand that getting good grades and getting a strong SAT or ACT are *different games*, you can also allow for the possibility that they may take longer to master than you expect.

Every game is different. Just because Serena Williams is a great tennis player, should we assume that she would immediately be equally great at baseball or softball? Do we assume that the superior hand-eye coordination that Serena shows in tennis would automatically carry over into the batter's box? Clearly, no! That doesn't mean that Serena *couldn't* become great at those games; she would just need some time to do it!

Every brain is different. For whatever reason, I found that Science topics took me longer to learn than English or History, but in the end I could get just as good. If I hadn't allowed myself the additional time to learn Science, I'd never have mastered it—and I would just have assumed I was "bad at science."

If your goal is to learn something really well, remember that faster is not necessarily better and slower is not necessarily worse. I improved hugely as a musician just by giving myself more time to learn the music I would be performing.

The most expert coach in the world cannot tell you in advance exactly how many games you need to play in order to be great.

So many students fall short of their goals on the SAT or ACT simply because they get discouraged and give up.

They think, "If I'm not getting this right now, I'm not *ever* going to get it."

And that's just not true. Every game is different. Every brain is different.

So when you are approaching the SAT or ACT, give *your* brain enough time to play *your* best game!!

3) Avoid meaningless comparisons with others.

Make this *your* game.

Students go through so much unnecessary stress and discouragement by making needless—and meaningless—comparisons between their performance and those of their peers.

Why meaningless? Because, like I said before, every brain is different. There are too many dimensions to our thinking and too many ways for our minds to put together success. Trying to compare one mind to another just doesn't make sense.

I learned this the hard way in middle school and high school when I compared myself to a girl in my class named Barbara. While I was doing really well, Barbara never seemed to miss a question, and that got to me.

I would be proud of a hard-earned 93 on a biology test, until I found out that Barbara got a 105. She wouldn't even miss the extra credit questions! It was brutal. I could never win.

But here's the worst part: as a result of my needlessly comparing myself to Barbara, I began to de-value my own skills. I became discouraged and eventually I decided that my best move was to not try to be smart at all.

Later, when I learned how to tap more of my potential, and found out that I did not have the limits I thought I had, I saw the folly of ever comparing myself with Barbara—or anyone else—in that way.

Stay in your own bubble. Don't worry about how well or poorly your friends are doing on their SAT or ACT.

There's only one mind you're responsible for making the most of—*yours*.

4) Learn the SAT / ACT Game

So now you've let go of some of what's held you back in the past. You've stopped telling yourself you are no good at standardized tests. You've given yourself time to succeed. You've stopped making needless and discouraging comparisons with other people.

So now you're ready to move forward

Now it's time to learn the SAT / ACT Game!

Take a fresh approach to the SAT and ACT by approaching them as what they really are: games of skill.

Think for a minute about any game you've ever learned to do well. What did you do? I bet you did these four things:

- 1) You got someone good to show you how to play
- 2) You learned the moves of the game
- 3) You practiced the moves in combination
- 4) You played the game *a lot*

What do I mean by learning the moves of a game? These are the small skills that make a big game possible.

If you ever learned tennis, you first learned the grip, stance, forehand, backhand, serve, net play...

If you ever learned to play basketball, you had to learn to dribble, pass, shoot jump shots, shoot lay-ups, how to play defense...

If you ever learned a musical instrument, you learned how to produce a good tone, how to play a group of notes at a time, how to play chords, how to play in proper rhythm...

What am I getting at here? Anything and everything you want to learn, and learn well, you *can* learn—and become great at—by making a game out of it.

Begin to see the thing as a game, and you can immediately stop struggling with it and simply follow the steps to learn how to play.

5) Practice your game—and let go of the outcome.

Here's a secret that great performers—geniuses and champions in games of all kinds—have long understood.

The highest levels of performance can't be forced.

The scientist or business innovator has a stunning insight that appears as if by magic. The golfer makes the perfect putt. The basketball player sinks the game-winning shot at the buzzer.

In all of these instances, the performer is focusing on what he or she is doing—not stressing about the outcome!

The secret to truly great performance is to be determined and at the same time, relaxed. To make it happen, and at the same time, let it happen.

No one ever expressed this idea better than the legendary college basketball coach John Wooden. Each year, Wooden would tell his team, "I'm not going to tell you that we'll win the national championship this year. I'm going to tell you that we'll prepare like champions."

Wooden's teams won ten national championships.

Great results are a byproduct of great practice.

Focus on practice. Fall in love with the game. Pay attention to what you're doing. As Tom would say, "Keep your eye on the ball, not on the scoreboard."

When you play a mental game like the SAT and ACT, understand that your brain has much more potential than you now know how to use. But trust the idea that *your brain wants to keep giving you more.*

So don't put a chokehold on your potential by worrying or stressing. Just let your brain keep giving you more.

And from time to time, you will be pleasantly surprised as you leap to a new level of play.

Just focus on playing your best game—and the outcome will take care of itself.