**PSAT Test-Taking Strategies**

**WHAT’S ON THE TEST?**

The PSAT is comprised of three different sections: reading, writing, and math. There are 139 questions total and you will have 2 hours and 45 minutes to complete the test, 60 minutes for the reading section, 70 minutes for math, and 35 minutes for writing. Most questions are multiple choice, there is no essay like there is in the SAT, and you will be able to use a calculator (but **not** a calculator on your phone).

1. **Take multiple practice tests**

The best way to prepare for the PSAT is by taking multiple practice tests. Practice tests can be found online for free through multiple websites, and you can also buy study guides that include practice tests for each section and questions to study. Take multiple practice tests and assess your strengths and weakness after each one.

1. **Work easiest questions first…**

…and then come back to finish questions that are harder, and then to the ones that are hardest. “Easiest” questions will be different for everyone. You can only work in one section at a time, but since you get points based on the number of questions answered, don’t get stuck on a hard question that takes lots of time, when you could be answering five more that are easier.

1. **You can build your PSAT score if you can fill in the blanks**

Sentence Completion exercises test both your vocabulary and reasoning skills. As you scan each sentence, you can **try to predict what word would most appropriately fill each blank**. You may find that you can guess what word should fill one, but not all, blanks in a sentence. Don’t panic. Here’s a chance to use your reasoning skills. Look at the answer choices and see if one features a word similar to that you guessed. **Then eliminate the selections that do not fit your prediction**.

1. **The PSAT puts the answer right in front of you**

The great thing about multiple-choice questions, whether they focus on writing or math, is **that they give you the answer. Your job is simply to recognize it**. In the writing portion, you’ll be tested on your knowledge of grammatical rules and sentence structure. Generally, the object of your search is clarity, so the simplest answer is usually the best. If a response seems awkward or overly complex, it is likely to be incorrect.

As for the math questions, you can greatly improve your chances of a correct response by **first eliminating the outlier**—the one response that bears little resemblance to the others. You'll be given reference formulas and facts, but you'll need to know how to use them. You're allowed to use a calculator, but, again, it won't help you unless you know how to approach the problems**. If you get stuck, substitute numbers from the answer choices** as your variables. **Start with the middle number**—if it doesn't work, you’ll know whether to choose a higher or lower number.

1. **If you don't know an answer, make an educated guess!**

You don’t lose points for wrong answers, but **you do lose points for skipped answers**. Random guessing won't do much for your score, but if you can make an educated guess (where you eliminate at least one of your answer choices), you can boost your chances of getting the question right. This helps when you feel stuck on the right answer but want to move on and can rule out at least one of the other answer choices. An educated guess always beats a blind stab, so **try and reason your choices down to two before taking a guess**. In doing so, you’ll greatly improve your chances of success. Remember that the PSAT only penalizes you for wrong answers in the multiple-choice and fill-in sections, not in the math grid-ins.

1. **Your PSAT score can add up if you do the math**

The math questions require you to calculate your response and place it into a grid**. Remember that the grid does not contain a minus sign, so an answer can't be a negative number**. There is no penalty for incorrect responses here, so go ahead and make your best guess. You can't grid mixed numbers, so **if you get a mixed number as an answer, you'll have to convert it to an improper fraction or a decimal**.

1. **When working on the PSAT test, think in broad strokes**

The secret to most reading comprehension exercises is to grasp the main ideas and themes. Don’t get bogged down by trying to remember every detail as you read. You can look these up later, if needed. Scan the text thoroughly enough to get the big picture. Then address the questions that refer to a specific passage. If you have time, you can then return to the harder questions.

1. **The night before you take the test**

Don’t cram the night before you take the test. Get your studying out of the way a couple of days in advance of taking the test, so that the night before you take the test you can relax and get some rest. Your brain needs to refresh and be prepared for the test. If you have to, skim over certain strategies, but don't spend too much time studying the night before. As always, get a good night’s sleep, and eat breakfast so your brain can do it’s best thinking!