



IVY BOUND

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Helping students enhance their academic futures

College Prep Suggestions for Teens and Parents -

I. Suggestions for Freshman Year:

Enjoy yourself. Take advantage of a broad range of courses if you can. That helps propel you to internships, summer jobs, and eventually colleges that coincide with what you really like.

There is no need to take the SAT I or PSAT during freshman year. Some students might want to take an SAT II (SAT subject test) at which they are proficient in June of freshman year, at the conclusion of a course they are currently in. If this is the last year of a language in which you have done very well but don't care to continue with, then June might be the best time.

Do make sure you are taking Algebra I or Geometry, if you have not yet had both. If you are being subject to "consumer math" or statistics and have not had a semester of Algebra I and Geometry, **insist** that you be allowed to take one of these courses. And if your school is trying to place you in an "Integrated Math" program, **get out**. Their track records in helping kids for standardized tests and college level math are poor. Finally, try hard to be in a class with an engaging math teacher. (In other subjects, if stuck with a bad teacher, students can learn the subject well online; math is very hard to learn well without an engaging teacher or paying for a private math tutor.)

1a. Suggestions for Summer Before Sophomore Year:

READ! Too few students read for pleasure and it hurts when it comes time to take the verbal sections of the SAT. If you're one of those who wants to be ahead of the curve AND have had a semester each of Algebra and Geometry, consider taking the Ivy Bound course over the summer or summer/fall in preparation for the October PSAT or November / December / January SAT in 10th grade. Some of the skills we work on, particularly in reading, and Writing are beneficial for the rest of high school.

Ivy Bound offers Speed Reading and Study Skills, which are short courses designed to enhance summer reading and then fall school success.

If you prove to be a high-flier with a chance at winning a National Merit Scholarship award, consider taking the PSAT in October of Sophomore Year. There is no need to take a separate course for the PSAT; the skills tested there are the same as those tested on the SAT I.

II. Suggestions for Sophomore Year:

This year is KEY. Mediocre freshman year grades are often dismissed, but sophomore grades are not. Do well. Take challenging courses where you like the subject, especially if they carry extra GPA weight. Kids who have the chance to take "AP" courses and resort to the lower challenge course often regret it.

Do make sure you are taking Algebra I or Geometry, if you have not yet had both. Note to students stuck in a "blended math" (or "integrated math") course -- for most kids they do a terrible job at preparing for the SAT. If the teacher is anything less than stellar, consider getting into a traditional math class.

In the winter, try to line up a good summer experience. A job, an internship, or a summer enrichment program is not only beneficial for college admissions offers, it's usually rewarding in itself, and often fun.

Consider taking SAT Subject Tests (formerly SAT IIs) this spring in a subject or two in which you have excelled. Students who have mastered their physics, chemistry, or biology curriculum and who will not be taking an advanced course in the subject as Juniors should use Sophomore spring to post a good science SAT II score to the colleges. If this is the last year of a language in which you have done very well but don't care to continue with, then June might be the best time. Taking three SAT IIs on a single test date is allowed, but studying for three SAT IIs in a 1 – 2 month period is hard. Thus, unless the student can get 780+ on a Subject Test with little study, we prefer limiting to two SAT Subject Tests on a single date.

For most students SAT I prep is unnecessary until after sophomore year. However, students who have read a lot, have done well in math, or have good grammar skills have the ability to post a strong score in at least one section as 10th graders. For some students, the confidence, the assessment, or just the experience itself is valuable. Since colleges only evaluate the best scores students show them, there is no down side to a sophomore year score. Whether you want to spend a lot of time preparing is your decision. Since SAT I prep takes time away from academics, and colleges DO hold mediocre grades against you, waiting until the summer is best for students who can't carve out school year study time. Sophomore year SAT can thus be an attempt to nail a good score early, but a "practice test" otherwise.

You and your parents should PLAN for SAT I study. Consider getting a small group together and having an Ivy Bound instructor come to your home for a small "dining room" class. So long as you line up a group of 4 – 8 students by early May, Ivy Bound can come to you for a 2, 3 or 4 week session in either June, July, or August. (Class is complete in the summer, but we do follow-up testing every other weekend in the fall, plus phone reinforcement during the week.)

IIb. CRAFTING your Junior year schedule:

Here we defer to college guidance counselors. There are ups and downs to taking high level courses about which you might not be especially enthusiastic. But selective colleges do look at the “quality” of courses on your transcript. As a comfort to any student who wants to eschew an AP course yet still have a strong transcript, *you do not need to take an AP course to sit for the AP test*. Students armed with the regular course can self-study and take the AP test in May. Indeed, earning a 4 or 5 on the AP test without taking the “AP Course” looks very impressive to selective colleges, who view the achievement as extra evidence of the student as a resourceful self-starter.

IIc. Suggestions for Summer before Junior Year:

Enjoy yourself, but be businesslike in doing some academic enrichment AND in having a game plan for the fall. A job, an internship, or a summer enrichment program is not only beneficial for college admissions officers, it's usually rewarding in itself, and often fun. If you still want to spend most of your summer playing recreational golf at Dad's country club, fine, but make sure you get at least **three solid weeks** of volunteer experience, real work, or academic enrichment. Admissions officers are punishing qualified kids who don't seek to improve themselves over the summer.

During the summer - READ! Too few kids read for pleasure and it hurts when it comes time to take the verbal sections of the SAT. If you're one of those who wants to be ahead of the curve AND have had a semester each of Algebra and Geometry, consider taking the Ivy Bound course over the summer or summer/fall in preparation for the Oct., Nov., or December SAT in 11th grade. Some of the skills we work on, particularly in reading, are beneficial for the rest of high school.

Early, Middle, or Late Summer – do SOME SAT prep! August is often a good time to devote 2 – 4 weeks to SAT prep. For prep school students, June is often optimal. You can use this to then more easily continue study into the Junior fall and winter.

III. Suggestions for Juniors:

Say hello to the college guidance office by early fall. Find out the exact dates when SAT I and SAT II will be given and schedule yourself to prepare for, and take both.

The PSAT is of little use as a practice test. The format differs from the SAT, and unless you are a real high flier, there is no reward for doing well on the PSAT. The best way to do a practice SAT without it counting is to come to an Ivy Bound Practice SAT session. We offer these for free of charge two and three weekends prior to the October, November, April, and May SATs

In enjoyable subjects, take challenging courses, especially if they carry extra GPA weight. Kids who have the chance to take "AP" courses and resort to the lower challenge course often regret it.

Visiting college campuses is a matter of choice. Many students already know they are going to apply to a bunch of highly-ranked schools and will make visits only to the ones where they receive acceptances, in senior year. If you do want to make visits prior to then, make sure you note the

college's schedules. High school Feb, March or April vacations are usually best. You don't want to visit during a college vacation, or during a college's finals time. September (or even late August for schools that start then) is a good time as the students are not under academic pressure that early.

In the winter or spring, try to line up a good summer experience. A job, an internship, or a summer enrichment program is not only beneficial for college admissions, it's usually rewarding in itself, and hopefully fun.

IIIa. Suggestions for Summer Before Senior Year -

A full time internship, volunteer work, job, or study program has become almost standard for college bound kids following Junior year. If you can afford a foreign study program, we highly recommend it. Foreign programs are among the most broadening experiences possible, particularly when the participants have daily interaction with non-American students and families. Kids who come back even from a one week program often have a lot to talk about in college application essays.

If you have yet to nail down a great score on the SAT, sign up for a summer class. You don't need to study for Reading, Math, and Writing if one of those sections is already impressive. Concentrate on the one that's lacking by doing a partial-course. However, "impressive" means "will impress your target colleges". If one section is 600 when the other sections are 500 and your target colleges report average 640 scores, then you should be studying on all sections. A 600 that turns to 700 gives you leeway in case the 500 does not rise significantly. And a 750 impresses almost all colleges. Colleges tend to accept "pointy" applicants more than they did 25 years ago. 750 and 550 is thus a more impressive application for many colleges than 650 and 650.

IV. Suggestions for Seniors:

Hopefully, you read this two years ago, you're all done with the SAT, and can again devote yourself to academics and school activities. Some kids even take on an after-school volunteer position one or two days a week. Whether you have a current work or volunteer activity or not, assess your past experiences and ask one or two of your supervisors to provide a recommendation. Do this early in the fall semester. Your goal is to get them back by mid-October so they can be part of an early admission packet.

You have fall semester for a final crack or two at the SAT prior to the early deadlines (almost all colleges with Early Decision will accept the November SAT). If your SAT scores are already strong, concentrate on making senior fall the best set of grades so far. Colleges respect improving GPA trends (but not as much as overall strong GPA). If both GPA and SAT scores are not where you want them to be, at this point your guidance officer is the best person to help you structure your senior fall. Keep in mind that some college admissions offices are more GPA oriented and some are more SAT oriented. All things being equal, recognize this: even perfect grades in one final semester can only do so much, since at least 4/5 of your record is already set in stone. By comparison, a good score on a single test, the SAT can greatly compensate for mediocre GPA.

If SAT scores are not yet strong, but you are still aiming high, we typically suggest Oct. and Dec, with November reserved for SAT II. Though too late for "Early Decision", all colleges accept SAT scores from December and most accept even January. If your child cannot take the October test, we encourage signing up for BOTH November and December. Frame the situation as --

A) "We're scheduled for November and December. If you do great on the November test, you don't have to take the December; you're done and we'll just cancel for December" or

B) "We're scheduled for November and December. You have two opportunities to shine, so there's no pressure on this upcoming test."

Students sometimes resent the fact that after working hard for 2 or 3 years they STILL have to prove themselves on a test like the SAT. At most competitive four-year colleges the SAT and SAT IIs combined are as important as three years of GPA. The high schools that recognize this and that foster targeted test prep are doing well for their kids. Schools that eschew "teaching to the tests" and downplay them are doing a disservice for their college-bound kids.

We don't contend that it's good that the SAT carry so much weight. But given the reality of college admissions, the fact that it does carry so much weight means we want to give every one of our clients the best possible the opportunity to maximize her or his score.