

# Why Early Preparation is More Important than Ever

By Mark Greenstein, Founder and Lead Instructor, Ivy Bound Test Prep, August 2008  
[www.ivybound.net](http://www.ivybound.net) 877-975-1600

Publication permission granted so long as the name and URL are included.

The benefit of early preparation has never been higher. Students who get down to the business of college planning well before the traditional start have a heaping advantage in the college admissions game. Traditionally, guidance counselors meet students in January or February of junior year (usually after the seniors have finished their January applications). By this time many students have missed out on taking courses that could burnish their college resumes. In those winter meetings, students also find they missed out on taking an early SAT prep course, and totally missed the boat on the possibility of earning National Merit Scholarship recognition.

I believe the time to consult with a good counselor is fall or winter of sophomore year. That's when the counselor can help structure the spring schedule, help steer towards a meaningful summer, and help assess which, if any, SAT II (a.k.a. SAT Subject Tests) or AP exams should be taken that spring.

Sophomore year college counseling allows students who face momentous decisions on extracurricular activities to gain wisdom from the track records of hundreds of students before them. Sophomore year is also the last good chance for a student to take up an activity. By junior year, colleges want to see that you have delved passionately into your extracurricular activities.

If your counselor cannot do an in-depth assessment and start planning with you by winter of sophomore year, get an independent consultant. One good source for consultants across North America is [www.iecaonline.com](http://www.iecaonline.com). I have long said that a good consultant gives the admissions value of attending a Prep School.

Though you don't need a college counselor in 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade, you still can be aided by good planning. For example, entering a science competition for the first time is best done as a freshman. You will not likely place high as a freshman, but by the third year, you'll have learned how to do it doubly better and triply better, and likely place high then. The same goes for artistic competitions: situational experience matters.

Now, let's say you do place high in a competition as a freshman. Your sophomore year entry has an even better chance because of your "pedigree". "She placed third last year...she MUST be good" is near-universal thinking among judges.

Now, among the advantages of early SAT preparation:

- 1) Studying for the SAT tangentially helps one's academics. The grammar, the essay writing, and the vocabulary that a good SAT course provides are likely to help a student improve her/his English grade. The regimented independence that many SAT study courses provide

creates a good foundation for studying when electives pre-dominate an upperclassman's agenda.

- 2) Starting early means more chances for success. The SAT is not a one-shot deal, and multiple chances mean on SOME occasion a student fires on all "24 cylinders" and gets a turbo-charged score.
- 3) Being done early allows smart assessment of colleges. When sitting on a solid SAT score by February, you can make intelligent college visits over the next few months (February and April breaks are my favorite times to visit colleges). A good SAT score means you need not visit so many "back-up" colleges.
- 4) Being done early is a relief. The junior spring is often crowded with AP exams, SAT IIs, finals, sports banquets, proms, awards ceremonies, college visits, plays, girlfriends, driver education, spring fundraisers, volunteer events. To keep the SAT out of that mix is wise.
- 5) Being done early means you can apply more strategically. While colleges accept October and even November score for ED (Early Decision), CHOOSING that one college for an ED application is best done based on knowing your SAT score rather than guessing what it will be. ED continues to be advantageous in college admissions and EA (Early Action) helps with merit scholarship awards.

As I've written elsewhere, nothing in the junior year curriculum directly helps SAT success (unless you attend a school with a dedicated for-credit SAT course). Thus early preparation has no downside. And since SAT scores have never been more important, students choosing to wait should have a very good reason for the delay.

Ivy Bound offers a "New Year's Boot Camp" in Connecticut. This is to get students to build SAT reading skills, to build SAT essay skills, to perfect their grammar, and to begin "reasoning" the SAT way. Each four day "Boot Camp" is open to students in grades 6 – 10. They include 7 hours of daily teaching and a mandatory 2 hours of daily self-study (except on New Year's Eve, when we have a supervised party). Parents who lack a private admissions counselor have the option to have a two hour "Understanding College Admissions" consultation during the Boot Camp. Parents seeking to enroll their 6<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> grader for Dec 26 – 29 or Dec 30 – Jan 2 may contact Ivy Bound at [info@ivybound.net](mailto:info@ivybound.net).