

## English in Use

Text: Tiffany Chen

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Target

## SAT test-taking tips

**B**EFORE high school graduation, many students share common experiences such as learning how to ride a bike and racing to meet deadlines for certain pieces of homework, but none of them strikes as much fear into their hearts as taking the SAT for university admissions. The SAT is an unforgiving four-hour exam required for admission to many universities in the United States. With college admission rates sinking ever lower, the SAT I (*Scholastic Assessment Test*) is a **hurdle** for millions of hopeful students dreaming of the American college experience.

**Underline, underline, underline**

WHEN educators review exams with students, it is always **astounding** that almost none of the latter mark up the exam paper. You are more than allowed to write all over your SAT booklet, after all.

For the critical reading passages, underline the parts that relate to the three most common question types – the main idea, the structure and the author's tone. Since the College Board, the developer and administrator of the test, has a set number of comprehension skills that it wants to test students on, you already can try to find the **prospective** answers by highlighting aspects that are important to understanding the passage well before you even attempt answering the questions themselves. This may include marking up the thesis and the structure, as well as key words that show the author's attitude towards the subject at hand.

**In search of lost time**

MORE than just the title of Marcel Proust's most famous novel, 'In search of lost time' is a reminder for students to use every second during every section of the SAT. It is common to see students twiddling their fingers and staring at the clock, even though there are still several minutes until the time is up. Even if there are mere seconds left, it is always worth checking your work to minimise careless mistakes.

On the flip side, many students complain that they often run out of time before bubbling in their answers, let alone having minutes to check their work. What should you do? Make sure you use every second by wearing a watch so you can pace yourself. Similar

to a marathon, you need to understand how you manage your time, and adjust your progress accordingly. Do you usually rush through the math section without carefully reading the questions? Then spend an extra few seconds for each maths question to make sure you do not overlook anything. Do you spend too long poring over the **minutiae** of the reading passage? Then start learning how to skim through paragraphs while also **grasping** the main arguments made.

**So what?**

WITH respect to the essay section, a piece of good advice for students is to imagine the essay is a short argument in which you try to be as straightforward as possible. Some students like to **craft** fancy sentences and ideas, often garbling the main point of the argument, while other students half-develop their points by arguing with vague, clichéd statements. "So what?" prompts students to be concise and precise, whether it is extracting the meaning behind flowery language or further developing blanket statements by providing evidence for them. Please be to the point for a well-developed point of view!

Most students already have the prerequisite knowledge to provide the right answers to all the sections on the SAT because of the rigorous academic training they receive at schools in Hong Kong. The best and most straightforward way to increase one's score – and in essence increase one's chances of being admitted to one's dream university – is to be well-versed in SAT test-taking skills. With the pointers mentioned above, it is possible for anyone hard-working to ace what first seemed an extremely hard examination. ■