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The newly designed SAT is a three hour and forty-five minute long exam. For teachers of second language learners, it is a challenge to help students prepare for the exam that is considered the primary aptitude test used in college admissions. This paper describes the reading and writing sections of the exam and will discuss strategies to help students prepare for them. High stakes exams can be anxiety producing, even for the best students, and second language learners have even more hurdles due to language and culture. It is possible and important to help familiarize these students with the format and expectations of this exam.

The old SAT *Verbal* section has been renamed *Critical Reading*. This section is a total of 70 minutes. There are two 25-minute sections and one 20-minute section. The analogy questions were eliminated and replaced with short reading passages. The *Writing* section contains a 25-minute essay in which students write in response an assignment prompt, and a 35-minute section with multiple-choice questions on English usage.

Scoring

Each section of the SAT is scored on a 200 to 800 point scale. The essay is graded on a holistic scoring scale. A complete explanation of this scale is available on the College Board website, and it is very useful explain this scale to students so they can understand the expectations of this essay. Most importantly, students should realize that they are not just being graded on their grammar or spelling. Even a top scoring essay may have minor technical problems.

Critical Reading

The reading passages cover the humanities, social science, science, and narrative. Students may have more or less experience reading different types of passages. Short passages are single paragraphs of about 100 words and a followed by a few questions. Long passages

range from 450 to 800 words, and are followed by 6 to 12 questions. Second language learners may find some passages more accessible than others, and it is useful to students to see examples of various types.

Reading passage questions ask about the main idea, contextual references, and vocabulary. For second language learners, it is important for them to realize that not all the questions concern details. The two most useful skills for the critical reading sections are skimming and scanning. By helping students become familiar with the format of the questions, they may also gain time and focus. Inference questions can deal with the big picture or with details in the passage, but they require the test taker to conclude something that is not explicitly stated in the passage. Teachers can help potential test takers by reading practice passages them to explain the point of the paragraphs and how they fit into the overall structure of the passage. It is useful to ask students to stop to sum up the main idea of the entire passage.

Writing

This writing section will most likely come at the beginning of the exam, and the essay will probably be the first section. The essay assignment will be written to be accessible to the general test-taking population, including second language learners. The essay is scored holistically, based on the overall quality of the essay and a demonstration of writing competence.

Essay

The SAT essay is not like most essays that students write in school. SAT essays are between 300-500 words and must be completed during the first 25 minutes of the testing session. Writing under pressure can be quite difficult for second language learners. Even though it might not be possible for a student to know how a practice essay might fare in terms of scoring, it is very important to for students to practice in timed practice sessions. It is also useful for students

to know what the general instructions look like so they can focus more quickly when they taking the test.

The SAT essay prompt is generally a quote that focuses on a specific theme. The assignment will require that students write a well-organized persuasive essay. The supporting evidence can come from a variety of sources including life experience, popular culture, literature, history and science and technology. Second language learners may find it a relief to know that scoring is not based entirely on mechanical skills. In fact, it is more useful for students to practice discuss major themes in the literature they are reading in school and to work on outlines. Graders will not be looking for historical or literary examples per se, but students who draw solely on personal experience may not able to write an academic argument with much success. The most important thing is that the student makes sure s/he understands the prompt and uses clear examples.

Grammar

Within the *Writing* section, grammar questions require test-takers to identify and correct mistakes in sentence structure. Some fill-in-the blank questions have with one blank and others have two blanks. Also, students will find sentence completion questions that test the ability of recognizing how parts of a sentence fit together. This section also contains paragraph-long passages. This type of passage is a draft of an essay in which parts of the passage need to be rewritten. Some questions are about individualized sentences or parts of sentences in which test-takers are asked to select the choice that will improve sentence structure and word choice. Other questions ask students to consider the organization and development of the essay.

Certainly, the best way to prepare for the SAT is for the students to practice their reading and writing skills in their classes, but it is also a good idea for students to familiarize themselves

with the general SAT format so they know what to expect on test day. Students should become familiar with the different types of questions on the SAT and the directions for each type of question. Students do not necessarily have to take a test prep course. There are many books available in libraries and free practice tests online. Free full-length practice SAT tests are available on the College Board website as well as other test sites. For second language learners, in addition to focusing on specific test-item types, it may also be useful to discuss general test-taking strategies. Since some students may be the first in their family to apply to college, it might be useful to address broader SAT-related questions including sending scores to different colleges, taking the SAT multiple times, and taking other college-related standardized exams.

Above all, it is helpful to remind students that colleges and universities use the SAT as just one factor among others when making admissions decisions. Teachers can help students to familiarize themselves with the test format and test question types well in advance of the test. Certainly, many of the strategies presented in this paper would be useful for any student who is trying to prepare for this exam. For second language speakers, however, this preparation is crucial because language and cultural issues can make this exam extremely difficult.