

BY MARY ANN CHASTAIN—ASSOCIATED PRESS

The new college admissions test makes its debut in March, with changes in format, content, test time and more. It will be given in 10 sections and last 3 hours 45 minutes.

Choices

The New SAT: (a) Ready or (b) Not?

By GARY R. GRUBER
Special to The Washington Post

The new SAT debuts in March, much to the trepidation of many high school students and their parents.

The new college admissions test will have some significant changes, including the addition of a 25-minute written essay, and a multiple-choice writing section that tests a student's grammar skills.

Other changes include the elimination of analogies (Pencil Paper), which will be replaced with short, paragraph-length reading passages, including one short paired paragraph.

And though grammar and usage will be tested, students will not be asked to define or use grammatical terms. Spelling and capitalization will also not be tested.

The math section will eliminate quantitative comparisons (Is xy greater than $2xy$, less than $2xy$, equal to $2xy$, etc.). It will include some advanced math, covering topics in Algebra II, some modern math, statistics, probability and data analysis.

Some key things will remain the same. The test will still measure reasoning ability and problem-solving skills. The other parts of the test will still contain some long and shorter reading passages, two contrasting passages, and math questions similar to those in the past.

There will be a range of three scores, each from 200 to 800, for Writing, Math and Critical Reading. The total possible score will be 2400.

The new test will be 10 sections given in 3 hours 45 minutes, compared with three hours for the current test.

Test dates are March 12, May 7, June 4, Oct. 8, Nov. 5 and Dec. 3.

Below are 16 questions that give you some example of what to expect. Give yourself 16 minutes to answer them.

CRITICAL READING: Seven questions. Give yourself eight minutes.

Sentence Completion. Fill in the blank(s) with the appropriate choice:

1. The instructor displayed extreme stubbornness; although he ___ the logic of the student's argument, he ___ to acknowledge her conclusion as correct.

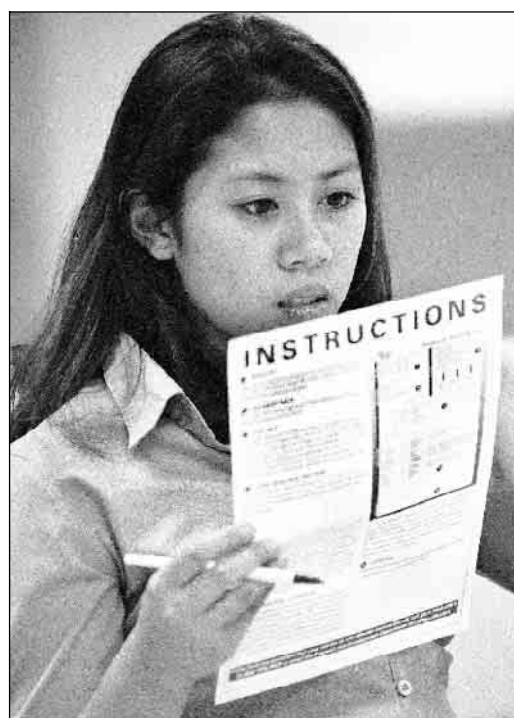
- (A) accepted/refused
(B) concluded/consented
(C) denounced/declined
(D) asserted/acceded
(E) rejected/preferred

2. In spite of the ___ of her presentation, many people were ___ with the speaker's concepts and ideas.

- (A) interest/enthralled
(B) power/taken
(C) intensity/shocked
(D) greatness/gratified
(E) strength/bored

3. Richard Wagner was frequently intolerant; moreover, his strange behavior caused most of his acquaintances to ___ the composer whenever possible.

- (A) contradict
(B) interrogate
(C) shun
(D) revere



BY JENNIFER DOMENICK FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

(E) tolerate
Read the following passage, then answer the questions.

Sometimes the meaning of glowing water is ominous. Off the Pacific Coast of North America, it may mean that the sea is filled with a minute plant that contains a poison of strange and terrible virulence. About four days after this minute plant comes to dominate the coastal plankton, some of the fishes and shellfish in the vicinity become toxic. This is because in their normal feeding, they have strained the poisonous plankton out of the water.

4. Fish and shellfish become toxic when they:

- (A) swim in poisonous water
(B) feed on poisonous plants
(C) change their feeding habits
(D) give off a strange glow
(E) take strychnine into their systems

5. In the context of this passage, the word "virulence" means:

- (A) strangeness
(B) interest
(C) calamity

(D) potency
(E) powerful odor
6. The paragraph preceding the one in the passage most probably discussed:

- (A) phenomena of the Pacific Coastline
(B) poisons that affect man
(C) toxic plants in the sea
(D) characteristics of plankton
(E) phenomena of the sea

7. It can be assumed that "plankton" found toward the end of the passage are:

- (A) fish and shellfish
(B) small plants or animals
(C) sand deposits
(D) land parasites
(E) glacier or rock formations

MATH: Seven questions, seven minutes.

Regular Multiple Choice Math

1. If $2x + 3y = 4$ and $y = 2$, find the value of x .

- (A) 2 (B) 1 (C) 0 (D) -1 (E) -2

2. Where a is not equal to 1, $(a^7 - a^9) / (a - 1) =$

- (A) $a / (a - 1)$ (B) $1 / (a - 1)$ (C) $a^8 - a^8$ (D) a^8 (E) a^6

3. Sarah is twice as old as John. Six years ago Sarah was four times as old as John was then. In years, how old is John now?

- (A) 3 (B) 9 (C) 18 (D) 20 (E) Cannot be determined

4. A four-sided figure ABCD contains interior right angle C. AB equals 12, BC equals 3, CD equals 4 and AD equals 13. What is the area of the figure ABCD?

- (A) 36 (B) 108 (C) 156 (D) 1,872 (E) Cannot be determined

Math: Fill-in Answers

In the following questions you must find an answer without referring to choices:

5. If $x + y = 7$ and $xy = 4$, then find the value of $x^2 + y^2$.

6. If $y + 2q = 15$, $q + 2p = 5$ and $p + 2y = 7$, then find the value of $p + q + y$.

7. On a street with 25 houses, 10 houses have fewer than six rooms, 10 houses have more than seven rooms, and four houses have more than eight rooms. What is the total number of houses on the street that are either six-, seven- or eight-room houses?

WRITING: Two questions, one minute.

1. Identifying Sentence Errors: Which part (A, B, C or D) is incorrect? Choose E if there is no error.

If any signer of the Constitution (A) was to return to life (B) for a day, his opinion (C) of our amendments (D) would be interesting.

E (No error).
2. Improving Sentences: Which choice correctly replaces this sentence?

He never has and never will keep his word.
(A) He never has and never will keep his word.
(B) He has never yet and never will keep his word.

(C) He has not ever and will not keep his word.
(D) He never has or will keep his word.
(E) He never has kept and he never will keep his word.

Gary R. Gruber's "Complete Preparation for the New SAT," 10th Edition (HarperCollins), will be available next month. Information: www.GruberTestPrep.com and www.collegeboard.com/newsat.

ANSWERS

CRITICAL READING	MATH
1. A	1. D
2. E	2. E
3. C	3. B
4. B	4. A
5. D	5. 41
6. E	6. 9
7. B	7. 11

WRITING
1. A
2. E

ANIMAL DOCTOR

Dear Dr. Fox:

I was hoping you could let your readers in on a little secret: Ferrets do, indeed, make ideal pets as long as you follow a few very simple rules.

Ferrets are not supposed to be kept in cages 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and played with for only a few minutes now and then, no matter how large a cage you provide for them. They still know it's a cage. You wouldn't keep your dog or cat in a cage that way, and ferrets are more like these animals than they are like rabbits and guinea pigs. The best solution for everyone involved is to place their cage in the room where you and your family spend most of the time. This room should also be "ferret-proofed" exactly as if you were baby-proofing it.

When you are home, your ferrets should be out of the cage and allowed to live with and react to you. You might want to attach a bell to their collar so that you don't step on them and so that they're easier to find. We just got our second ferret and have found that they behave much more responsibly if you give them free range.

Ferrets are illegal in California, New York City and the District of Columbia (and probably other places as well, but these are the ones I've found on the Internet).

Ferrets prefer rags for their bedding, and if you keep them clean you can almost eliminate their distinctive odor—just don't overpower their sensitive sense of smell with powerfully scented detergents. Also, use cotton as much as possible.

Use newspaper bedding for their litter box (it's not as dusty as cat litter, but if you already have a cat, your ferret will probably share the same litter box).

D.S., Bethesda

I occasionally receive letters from people with ferrets, and your advice will be helpful to those who have them and (as is so often the case with various species kept as pets) are not providing optimal care. A lack of understanding often results in much animal suffering.

Some people believe that pet-store ferrets are a wild spe-

cies, but they are not related to the American black-footed ferret (which is now almost extinct thanks to wildlife- and habitat-destroying non-sustainable cattle ranching activities and other misguided land uses). They were domesticated in Europe centuries ago, but, being carnivorous, must be given rabies vaccinations that, until recently, were not approved for use in ferrets, hence their ownership was prohibited by certain local health authorities.

Dear Dr. Fox:

This is in reference to my female dog Sabrina, who is 2½ years old. There are three humans (two children and one adult) in my household, but the family dog only follows me around the house. She likes to sleep and come into my bedroom when I'm home. Could you please tell me why she follows only me?

S.S., Houston

As a single mom, you are the primary caregiver and the leader of the "pack" (your family), and your devoted dog is acknowledging this by being your shadow. In addition, she may be interested in what you are doing and want to be involved, even though she may be a pest who's always under your feet.

Don't be too harsh with her when she gets in the way, because she may be fearful of being separated from you. Separation anxiety is common in dogs who have experienced family upsets (divorce, the death of a spouse or other family member) or who have been abandoned earlier in life and put up for adoption in an animal shelter.

Michael Fox is a veterinarian with doctoral degrees in medicine and animal behavior. Write to him in care of United Feature Syndicate, 200 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016. The volume of mail received prohibits personal replies, but questions and comments of general interest will be discussed in future columns.

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HINTS FROM HELOISE

Dear Heloise:

I sort my linen closet out every year or so (I'm a working mother—enough said!). By the time I'm ready to organize it again, it's turned into a complete jumble of top sheets, bottom sheets and pillowcases, with no chance of matched sheets even being on the same shelf. This year, I was determined to find a lasting solution and think this idea might work:

I matched up all sheets and pillowcases and refolded them carefully. Then I inserted top and bottom sheets plus one of the pillowcases inside the remaining pillowcase. When the "envelope" pillowcase is put up, I have a neat package that won't fall apart. We had guests this weekend, and I had a chance to try out my method. I selected my package from the linen closet and knew that everything I'd need was there—no turning the closet upside down looking for matching pillowcases. My linen closet looks great, too!

Anne Major, via fax

Dear Heloise:

One of your readers wrote that she puts address labels on her rolls of film to keep them from getting lost at the lab. That might work to some extent, but not after the processing begins.

Instead, the address can be put on the film itself. Print your name, address, phone number, etc., on a piece of paper using a bold pen. When you put a roll of film in your camera, take a photo of your info

sheet (make sure it's in focus), which will put it at the head of the roll, easily spotted by lab personnel. (Don't place it at the end. Sometimes the last frame gets chopped in half or destroyed.) You can carry the piece of paper with you, folded and rolled up inside a film canister.

Pamela Caillout, Prairieville, La.

Dear Heloise:

Something that I do whenever I leave town is unplug my garage-door opener. During a rainstorm one night, the door decided to open by itself—with a little help from a lightning strike nearby. If I hadn't been home at the time, all my expensive tools and other garage items would have been free for the taking, and the open garage would have provided perfect cover for someone trying to break into my house.

M.S., via e-mail

Dear Heloise:

When taking a shower, especially on a cold morning, light a candle in the bathroom. The mirrors will remain clear and not get foggy when your shower is complete. No bothering to wipe the mirrors. I've tried this several times, and it worked each time.

Dawn in Maryland

Send a hint to Heloise, P.O. Box 795000, San Antonio, Tex. 78279-5000, fax it to 210-HELOISE or e-mail it to Heloise@Heloise.com.

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Consummate Consumer

The Ultimate 'May I Speak to Your Supervisor?'

By DON OLDENBURG
Washington Post Staff Writer

Bernice McTigue experienced one of those "senior moments" in September, mixing up her commas and periods when paying her Verizon bill. Instead of \$68.58, she sent the phone company \$6,858.

Yeah, it's kind of funny—unless you're the one who made the mistake. A silly mistake that's easily fixed? You'd think. But that lost period was the start of an upsetting month for Bea and William McTigue.

Bea made repeated calls to Verizon trying to straighten out her error. Verizon customer service representatives promised to call back and didn't, she says. They said fixing the problem was up to "financial" and someone there would call her back, but no one did, she says.

All she wanted was a refund—proof that she wasn't out the \$6,000-plus—and maybe a customer service rep to reassure her that everything would be okay. "One of those customer service ladies told me I should be more careful in the future," says McTigue, a Fort Washington retiree. "Gee whiz, I didn't know that."

Verizon spokesman Harry Mitchell says its customer call centers handle more than 3.5 million customer calls each day. "A comparative few calls result in customer complaints," he says. "When a customer does have a concern or complaint, the vast majority of them are handled in a professional and timely manner by the Verizon service representatives taking the initial call."

Not this time. Bea's son, Mickey McTigue, says his parents "called Verizon at least 10 times."

Bea finally got some good advice: File an "executive complaint."

Most consumers know nothing about executive complaints. They don't know that larger corporations like automakers, big utilities and other Fortune 500 companies usually have a formalized process for complaints that are addressed to corporate bigwigs or that threaten realistic legal action, concern an obvious error, bad policy or a legitimate claim to remedial action.

Scott Broetzmann, president of Customer Care Measurement & Consulting, an Alexandria firm that studies customer service, says only about 5 percent of customers "escalate their complaints" beyond the first step. Less than 1 percent get to the executive complaint process. Depending on the complaint, some companies then provide priority handling by people in a position to resolve the problem quickly.

Mitchell says unsatisfied customers who exhaust the normal complaint process at Verizon and insist on "a higher-level appeal" are usually referred not to the executive complaint team but to its "special customer relations group." It reviews the case and works with "the local manager team to resolve the issue." That's where McTigue started getting a resolution.

Other firms and organizations handle executive complaints differently. AARP, for instance, has a dedicated staff that works with top executives to determine how to resolve them. Of 5 million e-mails, letters and phone calls AARP handles each year, about 15,000 are executive complaints.

"Especially if it is a complaint regarding their membership or where AARP has taken on an issue," says Ava J. Baker, director of member services, "those complaints are high priority."

When Bea McTigue did it, she first asked to speak to a "first-line or second-line supervisor," then said, "I'm filing an executive complaint."

Bea now calls those "the magic words." The day she used them, her complaint was turned over to someone at a higher corporate altitude than customer service.

"She talked to me as though we were both from the same planet and actually called when she promised," says Bea. She got her a refund check within a week.

Got questions? A consumer complaint? A helpful tip? E-mail details to oldenburgd@washpost.com or write Don Oldenburg, The Washington Post, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20007.

FOR MORE INFO

- For Verizon's online customer service: www.verizon.com or check your phone book.
- AARP's Web site is at www.aarp.org.