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His Course Helps Test Takers

Expert Knows Ins, Outs of SAT

By VALERIE SULLIVAN, *United Press International*

MILL VALLEY, CALIF.—It's college testing time, and despite all that last-minute cramming, you're faced with a question you can't answer.

Your instinct may be to panic, or to ponder it and waste precious time as the clock ticks on, defeating your chances to get into the school of your choice.

One solution is simply to guess, says test-taking expert Gary Gruber, or skip the question and return to it later if you have the time.

Better yet, says the author of some 23 exam preparatory books on overcoming test-taking horrors, bone up and do a little creative thinking, his way.

"What I'm giving the kid is an increase in intelligence," says Gruber, 41, a former physicist whose efforts have covered many tests, but especially the college admission exam known as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT).

Gruber, who works out of his Mill Valley home, oversees a teaching program that he says can help students improve their scores by an average 133 points on the 800-point SAT, an exam designed to measure a student's ability in math and verbal areas.

At a cost of \$135 per student, Gruber offers students seven weeks' preparation in test-taking strategies designed to save time in the testing room by zeroing in on a fast and logical way to answer a problem.

"I'd rather call it a thinking course—get what you've missed out of four years of high school," he said.

Gruber suggests boning up on such things as simple math formulas and Greek and Latin roots. Knowing that "pre" means "to go before" will help a student find the correct answer when asked what word is most nearly opposite "precursor," he said.

A math question may ask a student to subtract one-fifteenth from seven-sixteenths and state whether the answer is larger or smaller than six-fifteenths.

Adding one-fifteenth to both sums gives the correct answer in less time than it takes to do all the work in

looking for a common denominator.

Not only that, Gruber said, but, "This tells the kid what's going on fundamentally."

Even though the SAT penalizes students for wrong answers, guessing is better than leaving a question blank, Gruber says, because a student always has a chance of getting it right. If a student stops to ponder a question too long, that "mulling" usually lasts for the rest of the exam, he says.

Teaching students how to take a test could prove lucrative, Gruber admits, especially if the courses were expanded nationwide. But he balks at such a "franchise."

He says he would rather see his research applied to new ways of educating and evaluating students. Gruber is designing a weighted-answer test he believes could

Gruber says a weighted-answer test would more accurately gauge ability.

be a better vehicle for analyzing that age-old question—what's going wrong, or right—with students today.

In a weighted-answer test, students would be given partial credit for answers partly correct. The answers would be carefully scrutinized to show what strategy a student used or failed to use in reaching an answer, he says. It could even show whether the student had the necessary discipline to back away from a difficult problem, he says.

Gruber believes the "uncritical" philosophy governing the SAT also extends into the classroom, where students are taught to memorize facts, not to understand concepts.

"The kids are more alive than they've ever been," he says. "Why can't you entertain them with this kind of thing?"