

Practice tests: Why they matter

With countless quiz shows like *Jeopardy!*, *The Chase*, and *Who's Smarter than a 5th Grader?*, garnering millions of viewers worldwide, it's pretty clear that we all love a good test.

Okay, they're not the boring "sit alone at a desk and fill in bubbles with a pencil while a teacher yells at you to shut up" type of test high schoolers are accustomed to, but the essential principles are the same. You are presented with a challenge, you rack your brain to come up with the right answer, and you revel in the satisfaction of success. The crowd cheers, you get \$\$\$, and a dopamine rush floods your brain with feelings of bliss and contentment. And if these three rewards are enough to motivate millions around the world to take tests recreationally, they might just work on our bored high schoolers taking the SAT and ACTs.

1. The Crowd Cheers

For a teen, social acceptance is huge. You knew how huge it was when you got that perm in the 80s to blend into a sea of afros, and your student knows it when they straighten their hair to a crisp every morning. Although scoring high on a test may not merit social acceptance the same way a culturally appropriate head of hair can, we can still encourage and motivate our children by cheering them on ourselves. Study groups with friends or small group tutoring are also great options for building some healthy, motivational competition and peer support. Put simply, involving others in your student's challenges and successes, whether friends, tutors, or family members, could redefine something as mundane as the SAT and ACTs as a potential for social reward.

2. You Get \$\$\$

Not many think of it as anything beyond an admissions requirement for colleges, but the SAT and ACTs are one of the biggest factors in getting hundreds of thousands of dollars of **FREE MONEY** for college! That's right *free*, not loans, but merit-based scholarships. Even if your family is swimming in money, if your student's ACT and SAT scores are desirable to a college, they will pay to have them. Though your student won't become an instant millionaire like a quiz show contestant, if they plan to attend a private or Ivy league school with tuition upwards of \$40K a year, their savings on student loans will make them a lot richer than their ill-prepared counterparts. So, go ahead and tell your student the truth: Each hour they spend on SAT/ACT test prep equals hundreds of thousands of dollars.

3. Dopamine Rush

Fame and wealth mean nothing, however, without an intrinsic sense of reward. Science attributes this inner sense of reward and intrinsic motivation to dopamine, a neurotransmitter known as the "chemical of reward". Recent research has examined the role of dopamine deficiency in students with ADHD. Although the science has been inconclusive, thousands of students still effectively manage their symptoms with Adderall, a stimulant drug known to

increase dopamine levels in the brain. So why do some students seem to get a natural kick out of studying and good grades while others run for the playstation as soon as they get home? Well, you only get the dopamine rush if you get the question right, duh! If your student is struggling with a topic, lacks confidence, or just can't meet the expectations set for them, they get the opposite of a dopamine rush--discouragement and demotivation. But fear not! This is exactly why test prep centers and tutors exist.

An effective test prep program will be able to set achievable goals for your student so that they can tap back into those dopamine mines and recover the motivation they need to succeed long-term. And if a big test like the SAT and ACTs is what awaits them long-term, then short-term goals need to be structured to build them up for it. So...what better way to prepare for a test than to take a test?

Practice Tests!

Practice tests are hugely effective and rewarding ways to prepare for the SAT and ACTs. A scientifically established learning phenomena called the "testing effect" has time and again proven that students learn material better when continually tested on their knowledge than when lectured or made to review passively. Two main factors have been found to play a key role in the success of the testing effect--feedback and retrievability.

Feedback means that when your student gets a question right on the test, they receive immediate positive reinforcement. Whether a computer-generated "good job!" dialogue box, a pat on the back from a teacher, or an actual crowd cheering, this instant feedback is critical in sealing important test-related information in your student's brain. Obviously you can't have a team of cheerleaders accompanying your student into the testing room, however, the right test prep program will stimulate this experience with many practice tests, smiles, thumbs up, and maybe some candy.

Second, retrievability relates to your student's ability to remember what the test question is actually asking about. In order to increase retrievability, short and frequent review sessions will be the best use of your student's time. A good test prep program will be able to consistently recycle key information without boring or over-lecturing your student. Keeping information fresh in their minds will allow them to retrieve information quickly and accurately, resulting in positive feedback followed by a dopamine rush, a high test score, scholarship money, so on and so forth.

The Time is Now...

The time has come to detangle your student from their hair straighteners and detach them from their playstations. Get them into a test prep program where they can learn how to reap the rewards of their own biology--dopamine!--in addition to the extrinsic rewards that follow. With a lot of practice tests and positive feedback, they'll soon be on their way to crush the SAT and ACTs. And who knows, maybe one day they'll also end up crushing a quiz show.

To embark on this exciting, dopamine-fueled journey, head to www.testpreproadmap.com to get your student a diagnostic test and begin practicing now.