

# SAT Prep Companies: ‘Uncoachable’ SAT Good for Business

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The College Board this week announced changes to the SAT, promising to make the college entrance exam more aligned with high school and college curricula – and less susceptible to coaching.

Starting in the spring of 2016, students taking the test will no longer be quizzed on arcane and esoteric vocabulary words (possibly including words like arcane and esoteric). Instead, the test will focus on more everyday words. And the essay will become optional for the first time since 2005, bringing the “perfect score” back down to 1,600.

College Board President David Coleman says the changes will make the SAT a less-coachable exam. But SAT prep companies say this is actually good news.

“We have a pretty direct comparison with the GMAT,” says Veritas Prep Director of Admissions Scott Shrum, referring to the entrance exam for business schools, which was revised in 2012. “Across the board ... we had a very busy time during the first half of 2012 with people who were very worried about the [new GMAT]. I would be shocked if it were any different for this.”

## **Tutors: Actually Good News for Business**

By aligning the test with Common Core standards and creating a less-coachable exam, the College Board says it will help level the playing field for students who don’t have the means to pay for expensive test prep. On the low end, test prep can cost hundreds of dollars; on the high end, companies like Veritas Prep can command upwards of \$7,000 for private tutoring.

Erin Billy, the owner of California-based company TestMagic, agrees that the SAT has favored students who can afford tutoring.

“We work with local organizations to offer reduced costs or free help to the students,” says Billy. His company’s prep courses can range from \$800 to \$2,200.

But while the new test promises to reduce the effectiveness of test prep, the SAT tutors say they are skeptical. Many believe that students will still benefit from extra (and expensive) help, regardless of the new changes.

“Adding more to the curriculum and more material to the test just means more course offerings for us,” says Billy. The new SAT will include a new emphasis on social studies, for instance, which both Bill and Shrum say is good news for tutors.

“One of the changes is that you will be tested on a finite number of documents, like the Bill of Rights and the speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This invites more opportunity for coaching,” says Shrum.

But another notable change, some say, calls the College Board’s bluff when it comes to coaching. The College Board also announced Wednesday that it will be partnering with online education startup Khan Academy to provide free digital test prep for the new exam.

“There is always going to be space for test prep,” says Daniel Kennedy, who runs a two-person tutoring business called Kennedy Test Prep in New York City. “The very fact that they’re working with the Khan Academy proves the validity of test prep.”

### **Does It All Come Down to Money?**

While Shrum and Billy applaud some of the changes that do away with the “gimmicks” of the SAT, Kennedy questions the true motives of the College Board.

“Changes are being made really to try and get back the market share they are losing to the ACT, which is easier,” says Kennedy. The ACT doesn’t have an essay and places a lighter emphasis on vocabulary; last year, the ACT was taken by more students than the SAT for the first time.

Shrum agrees that the College Board seems to be playing catch-up with the ACT.

“In at least eight states now, they are using the ACT as an exit exam for graduation. Nobody is using the SAT in this way. If they can drive demand and revenue ... it will be great for business,” says Shrum.