

ACTION PLAN: Freshmen

You're just starting high school, so there's no real need for you to think about test prep just yet. Still, there are some things you can do to help make that process as quick and painless as possible when the time comes, and, luckily, these things will also help make you a better student and smarter, more well-rounded person, too.

1. Focus on doing as well as you can in school. Make sure that you're always paying attention in class, that you ask questions when you're unsure of something, and that you make appointments to see your teachers after school when you really don't understand something you're learning, especially in your math classes. Be diligent in completing your homework, and always give it your best effort. Start early on long-term papers and projects. Overall, make a commitment to be the best student you can be.

2. Read more. Read anything you'd like – books, magazines, newspapers, online articles and blog posts – just make sure you're doing so on a daily basis. And make sure that whatever you read you do so WORD FOR WORD. No rushing, no skimming. If you find that you spaced out during a paragraph and didn't pay any attention to what it meant, go back and re-read it. In order to really perform well on the SAT or ACT when the time comes, you'll need to be a good reader, and that means you need to start practicing now.

3. Try to be a better essay writer. When you're assigned an essay or report to complete at home, try hard to make it as good as it can be. Make sure your ideas are well organized, that your arguments are well presented, and, perhaps above all, that your grammar and syntax are correct and precise. If, when you proofread your essay, you think that something you wrote doesn't quite sound right, take time to fix it. Don't be satisfied until your essay sounds great when you read it all the way through. Ask your older siblings, parents, or teachers for help crafting and delivering your arguments clearly, coherently, and articulately. If you put serious effort over these next 6-12 months into becoming the best writer you can be, not only will your performance on the SAT and ACT improve, but you will have also developed an invaluable skill you'll use throughout your life.

4. Get involved in extra-curricular activities now. It's going to be tough to incorporate new extra-curricular activities into your schedule when things start getting crazy in junior year, especially when you have to work test prep into the equation too. Get involved now and slowly work those activities into your weekly and daily schedule so adding something like test prep on top of it a year or year and a half from now won't seem like a terrible shock to the system.