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[Education](#) > [SAT Guide](#) > [SAT Timing and Pacing](#)

SAT Timing and Pacing

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Since the SAT is three hours long, it is, above all, a test of endurance. Just as a runner trains differently for a marathon than for a sprint, so should you train for the long haul on the SAT. If you get stuck or a question looks too time-consuming, skip it and return to it later. Because the SAT is a long distance race, timing and pacing will be key to your success.

The bad news about timing

- You will not have as much time as you would like to answer all the questions on the SAT
- You will encounter words and math content that you either do not know or find very difficult.

The good news about SAT timing

- You do not have to answer every question to get a great score on the SAT
- You can make strategic decisions about how to use your time that will help you to maximize your score.

Strategy Tip: You don't have to answer every question in a section to get a good score on the SAT. If you can't eliminate any answer choices, it is better to skip a question than to guess blindly.

What's next:

[Guessing on the SAT](#)

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Education > SAT Guide > Guessing on the SAT

Guessing on the SAT

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There is no such thing as a guessing penalty on the SAT. There is, however, a wrong answer penalty. The wrong answer penalty is designed so that students who guess randomly won't earn extra points for the effort.

Here's how the wrong answer penalty works:

- You get 1 point for every correct answer
- You get a fraction of a point taken off for every incorrect answer (excepting Grid-ins)

Type of Answer	Correct Answer	Left Blank	Wrong Answer	Wrong Answer on QC	Wrong Answer on Grid-in
Raw points	1 point	0 points	-1/4 point	-1/3 point	0 points

As you can see, you get the same number of points for any correct answer (1 point), however, the amount subtracted from your score for a wrong answer varies according to question type. You get a 1/4 point off for most question types. So:

Strategy Tip: You should never guess randomly on the SAT. However, if you can rule out at least one answer choice on a question you don't know, it is worth it to guess.

The more wrong answer choices you eliminate, the more likely it is that you will beat the wrong answer penalty and get a higher score. Also: since there is no wrong answer choice penalty for Grid-ins, guess to your heart's content on that question type.

What's next:

Scoring on the SAT