PSAT/NMSQT

Tips and Strategies

Know the Test

What type of material is cover on the PSAT?

➢ Critical Reading, Writing, and Mathematics

How many sections does the test have?

➢ Five:

  ➢ Two 25-minute critical reading sections
  ➢ One 30-minute writing section
  ➢ Two 25-minute mathematics sections

Know the Test

Critical Reading

➤ Reading comprehension questions about full-length and paragraph-length passages

   ➤ Passage-based reading: 13 questions

➤ Exercises that ask you to complete a series of sentences

   ➤ Sentence completion: 35 questions

Reading Comprehension

Step #1

Read the questions before you read the passage.

O If you figure out what things you'll have to be looking for inside the passage before you read it, you may not have to re-read the passage once you've gotten around to the questions.

Reading Comprehension

Step #2

Label the question types.

O The questions will either be "G" general or "S" specific. Label them as such.

O General questions will ask you about the passage as a whole and don't require you to refer to any particular part of the passage – they may ask for tone, theme or main idea.

O Specific questions ask you to reference a particular word, phrase, or line in the text.

O After you've read the text, you'll answer the specific questions first and the general questions last.

Reading Comprehension

Step #3

Use your pencil to help you read.

O As you skim through the passage, mark up that text!

O Underline words that seem important.

O Circle anything that sounds like the questions you just read.

O Paraphrase difficult sentences in the margins.

O You'll save yourself a lot of re-reading time by understand the text completely the first time around.

Reading Comprehension

Step #4

Answer the questions with the answers covered.

O Go through each question (All the specific ones first and general ones second) and try to answer them all without looking at the answer choices.

O Chances are good that you'll actually come up with the correct answers in your head and you can simply uncover the choices to reveal the letter that matches your answer.

Reading Comprehension

Move on.

O Once you've finished answering all of the questions associated with that passage, proceed to the next question and start the process over again.

O Don't re-read, scrutinizing your answer choices.

O Statistics prove that your first choice will almost always be the right one.

Reading Comprehension

O The secret is to grasp the main ideas and themes.

O Don't get bogged down trying to remember every detail as you read. You can look these up later if needed.

O Scan the text thoroughly enough to get the big picture.

O Then address the questions that refer to a specific passage.

O If you have time, you can then return to the harder questions.

Sentence completion

O Tests both your vocabulary and reasoning skills.

O As you scan the sentence, you can try to predict what word would most appropriately fill each blank.

O Use your reasoning skills and look at the answer choices to see if on e features a word similar to your prediction.

O Then eliminate the selections that do not fit your prediction.

Sentence completion

Try following these steps without skipping ahead.

Step #1

O Cover the multiple-choice answers. No peeking! You're going to be doing some educated guesswork with just the question, which will lead to a higher score. So physically cover up the answers before you do anything else.

Step #2

O Decide if each part of the sentence holding the blanks has a *negative feel* or a *positive feel* to it. Put a plus sign or negative sign in the blank to remind yourself of what you chose.

Sentence completion

O Still keeping the multiple-choice answers covered, read the sentence in your head and fill in the blanks with words you know that might logically fit. Physically write those words down into the blanks.

Example: Hoping to _____ the dispute, negotiators proposed a compromise that they felt would be _____ to both labor and management.

Sentence completion

Step #4

O Now it's time to uncover the choices. If you're lucky, you may have come up with synonyms for one of the answer choices. Remember, both words have to fit, so physically cross out any answer where the first word is wrong.

Example: Hoping to _____ the dispute, negotiators proposed a compromise that they felt would be _____ to both labor and management.

A. enforce...useful
B. end...divisive
C. overcome...unattractive
D. extend...satisfactory
E. resolve...acceptable

Sentence completion

Solution: Hoping to ---+---- the dispute, negotiators proposed a compromise that they felt would be ---+---- to both labor and management.
A. enforce...useful
B. end...divisive
C. overcome...unattractive
D. extend...satisfactory
E. resolve...acceptable

O Right away, get rid of answers A and D,
   because *enforce* and *extend* would never be something negotiators
   would want to do to a dispute. Now I have better odds of getting it right.

O Both choices B and C's first words could work – *ending a dispute* and *overcoming a dispute* are both positive. But the second words do not fit – *divisive* is a negative word and so is *unattractive*.

O That makes E the answer.

Know the Test

Writing

➢ Identifying sentence errors: 14 questions

➢ Improving sentences: 20 questions

➢ Improving paragraphs: 5 questions

Writing

O You are tested on your knowledge of grammatical rules and sentence structure

O You will be asked to

    O Identify Sentence Errors

    O Improve Sentences

    O Improve Paragrahs

Identify Sentence Errors

O Read the entire sentence carefully but quickly.

O Look at choices (A) through (D) to see whether anything needs to be changed to make the sentence correct.

O Don't waste time searching for errors. Mark (E) **No error**, on your answer sheet if you believe the sentence is correct as written.

O Move quickly through questions about Identifying Sentence Errors. The other kinds of questions (Improving Sentences and Improving Paragraphs) will probably take more time.

O Mark questions that seem hard for you and return to them later.

Identify Sentence Errors

Example: If there is an error, select the one underlined part that must be changed to make the sentence correct. If there is no error, select E.

Sponsors of the Olympic Games <u>who bought</u> advertising
A

time on United States television <u>includes</u> <u>at least</u> a dozen
B   **C**

international firms <u>whose</u> names are familiar to American
D

consumers. <u>No error.</u>
E

Identify Sentence Errors

Sponsors of the Olympic Games <u>who bought</u> advertising
A

time on United States television <u>includes</u> <u>at least</u> a dozen
B **C**

international firms <u>whose</u> names are familiar to American
D

consumers. <u>No error.</u>
E

Explanation:
This sentence illustrates a subject-verb agreement error. The subject, "Sponsors of the Olympic Games who bought advertising time on United States television," is plural; the word underlined at choice B should be "include," to match the number of the subject.

Improving Sentences

O   Read the entire sentence carefully but quickly. Note the underlined portion because that is the portion that may have to be revised.

O   Remember that the portion with no underline stays the same.

O   Mark choice (A) if the underlined portion seems correct. Check the other choices quickly to make sure that (A) is really the best choice.

O   Think of how you would revise the underlined portion if it seems wrong. Look for your revision among the choices given.

O   Replace the underlined portion of the sentence with choices (B) through (E) if you don't find your revision.

O   Concentrate on the choices that seem clear and exact when you read them.

Improving Sentences

Example: Answer (A) is always the same as the underlined part. Choose answer (A) if you think the original sentence needs no revision.

Hearing that the Statue of Liberty did not have a pedestal, <u>a campaign was begun by Joseph Pulitzer to raise money</u> for the construction of one.

(A) a campaign was begun by Joseph Pulitzer to raise money
(B) a campaign to raise money was initiated by Joseph Pulitzer
(C) money was raised in a campaign by Joseph Pulitzer
(D) Joseph Pulitzer began a campaign to raise money
(E) Joseph Pulitzer had campaigned to raise money

Improving Sentences

Hearing that the Statue of Liberty did not have a pedestal, <u>a campaign was begun by Joseph Pulitzer to raise money</u> for the construction of one.

(A) a campaign was begun by Joseph Pulitzer to raise money

(B) a campaign to raise money was initiated by Joseph Pulitzer

(C) money was raised in a campaign by Joseph Pulitzer

(D) Joseph Pulitzer began a campaign to raise money

(E) Joseph Pulitzer had campaigned to raise money

Explanation:

This sentence contains an error of modification. The introductory clause, "Hearing that the Statue of Liberty did not have a pedestal," cannot modify "campaign": a campaign to raise money cannot hear things. As it is Joseph Pulitzer who did the hearing, choices D and E initially seem plausible. Choice E, however, unjustifiably uses the past perfect ("had campaigned"), leaving D as the only correct choice.

Improving Paragraphs

O Read the entire essay quickly to determine its overall meaning. The essay is meant to be a draft, so don't be surprised if you notice errors. Don't linger over those errors.

O Make sure that your answer about a particular sentence or sentences makes sense **in the context of the passage as a whole.**

O Choose the best answer from among the choices given, even if you can imagine another correct response.

Improving Paragraphs

Example:

Passage:

(1) In the last fifty years, computers in many forms have become increasingly accessible. (2) For example, today the calculator is regarded as an essential tool for basic calculations by students and business people. (3) Word processing is considered indispensable by most writers, researchers, and office workers. (4) In addition, many families use computers to organize information, to balance budgets, and to provide entertainment.

Question: Which of the following would be the most suitable sentence to insert immediately after sentence 1?

(A) The race is on to produce the "ultimate" computer.

(B) I have found the computer somewhat difficult to learn to operate.

(C) Many people are understandably intimidated by computers.

(D) They are now so common that they have a profound effect on daily life.

(E) Modern telephones belong to the family of computers.

Improving Paragraphs

Explanation:

O   This question asks you to recognize that sentence (1) does not adequately introduce the examples described in sentences (2), (3), and (4). The examples do more than illustrate how "increasingly accessible" computers have become; they point out how indispensable and widespread the use of computers has become. The only choice that expresses this idea is choice (D). The correct paragraph reads:

O   In the last fifty years, computers in many forms have become increasingly accessible. They are now so common that they have a profound effect on daily life. For example, today the calculator is regarded as an essential tool for basic calculations by students and businesspeople. Word processing is considered indispensable by most writers, researchers, and office workers. In addition, many families use computers to organize information, to balance budgets, and to provide entertainment.

Know the Test

Mathematics

➢ Topics: numbers and operations, algebra and functions; geometry and measurement; statistics, probability and data analysis.

➢ Multiple-choice: 28 questions

➢ Grid-ins: 10 questions

Mathematics

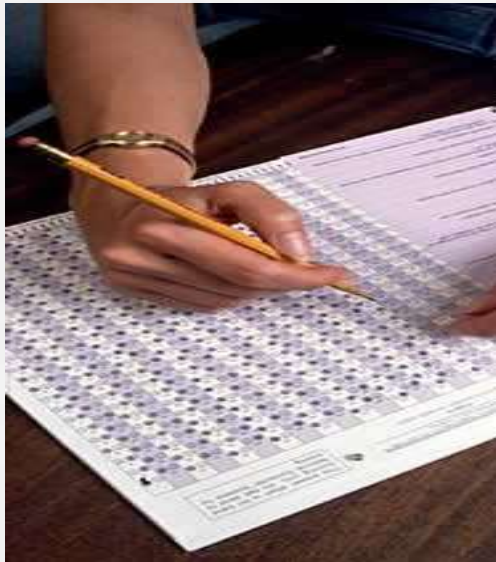In each math section, the questions are arranged easy to medium to hard.

O Take your time on the easy and medium questions to get them correct.

Multiple-choice

O You can greatly improve your chances of a correct response by first eliminating the outlier – the one response that bears little resemblance to the others.

O You are only penalized for wrong answers.

Mathematics

There are 3 main strategies in the Multiple-Choice section to help you find the best answer.

1. Work the problems in your booklet

2. Substitute numbers for variables

3. Plug in answer choices

Work the problems in your test booklet

O Sketch figures, lines, etc. to help you work through a problem

O Mark figures with information given: numbers, variables, etc.

O Cross out answers as you eliminate possibilities

Substitute numbers for variables

O Substitute numbers in for variables

O Substitute small numbers that are easy to work with

O Check the "magic 5": zero, one, positive integers, negative integers and fractions/decimals

Substitute numbers for variables

Example: If x is an even integer, y is an odd integer and z is an odd integer, then which of the following must be even?

(A) xy + 1
(B) x + y
(C) x + z
(D) x + yz
(E) x + y + z

Example: If x is an even integer, y is an odd integer and z is an odd integer, then which of the following must be even?

Let x=4, y=3, and z=5

(A) xy + 1 $\longrightarrow$ 4(3) + 1 = 13, odd

(B) x + y $\longrightarrow$ 4 + 3 = 7, odd

(C) x + z $\longrightarrow$ 4 + 5 = 9, odd

(D) x + yz $\longrightarrow$ 4 + 3(5) = 19, odd

(E) x + y + z $\longrightarrow$ 4 + 3 + 5 = 12, even

Plug in Answer Choices

O Plug in the answer choices to see which one works

O The answers are listed from lowest to highest or highest to lowest. Try starting with the answer choice (C) and working up or down

Example: If a certain number is tripled and the result is increased by 9, the number obtained is 30. What is the original number?
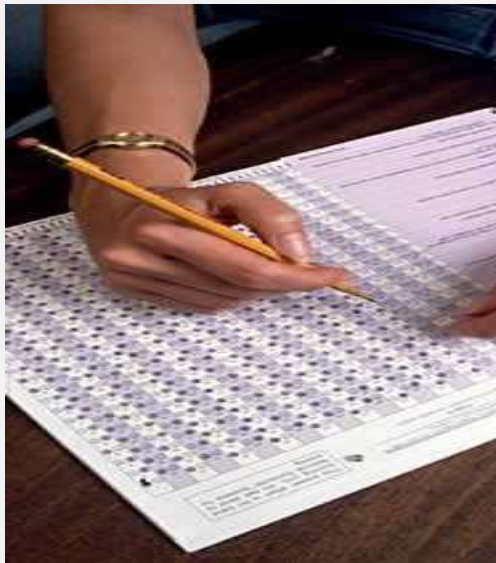
(A) 3
(B) 7
(C) 9
(D) 27
(E) 30

Example:

If a certain number is tripled and the result is increased by 9, the number obtained is 30. What is the original number?

(A) 3 $\longrightarrow$ 3(3) + 9 = 18, NO

(B) 7 $\longrightarrow$ 3(7) + 9 = 30, YES

(C) 9 $\longrightarrow$ 3(9) + 9 = 36, NO

(D) 27 $\longrightarrow$ 3(27) + 9 = 90, NO

(E) 30 $\longrightarrow$ 3(30) + 9 = 99, NO

Mathematics

There are 5 main strategies in the **Grid-in** section to help you find the best answer.

1. Practice with the grid
2. Range of possible answers
3. Integers, decimals, and fractions
4. Multiple answers
5. No penalty for incorrect answers

Practice with the Grid

O Only the gridded answers will be scored!

O Do not mark more than 1 oval in any column!

O Make sure the ovals are filled in correctly!

Range of Possible Answers

O There are no negative answers in the grid-in section!

O The acceptable answers include zero and positive integers, decimals, and fractions up to four places.

Integers, Decimals, Fractions

O   One, two, and three digit integers can be started in any column as long as the entire answer fits completely.

O   Do not insert commas for four digit integers: 3245

O   Do not grid zeros before decimal points: .45

O   Change mixed numbers to decimals or improper fractions only: 6 ¼ becomes 6.25 or $\frac{25}{4}$

O   Completely fill the grid with a repeating decimal, rounded answers will not be accepted: $\frac{2}{3}$ becomes .667 or .666 only

O   Fraction and decimal answers can be interchanged as long as they are gridded correctly.

Integers, Decimals, Fractions

Example: If the ratio of x to y is $\frac{1}{4}$, what is the value of the ratio of $3x$ to y?

Integers, Decimals, Fractions

Example: If the ratio of *x* to *y* is $\frac{1}{4}$, what is the value of the ratio of 3*x* to *y*?

Solution: The ratio can be written as $\frac{x}{y}$

therefore $\frac{3x}{y} = \frac{3(1)}{4}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$

This can be gridded as $\frac{3}{4}$ or .75

Multiple Answers

O It is possible to get more than one correct answer in the grid-in section.

O Usually the question will read "What is one possible value of y?, implying that more than one answer is possible.

O Choose one of the answers and grid it in the appropriate place.

Example: The length and width of a rectangle have integer values. If the area of the rectangle is 50, what is one possible value for the perimeter of the rectangle?

Multiple Answers

Example: The length and width of a rectangle have integer values. If the area of the rectangle is 50, what is one possible value for the perimeter of the rectangle?

Solution: If the area is 50, then the possible dimensions of the rectangle are 2 by 25 or 5 by 10. Therefore, the possible perimeters would be 54 and 30.

Choose either 54 or 30 and grid it in the appropriate place.

No Penalty for Incorrect Answers

O You will not lose any points for grid-ins answered incorrectly

O Feel free to answer all the grid-in questions

General Strategies

O Take a practice test.

O Try educated guessing: reason your choices down to two before taking a guess.

O Students can earn an above average score by getting only half the questions right and omitting answers for the rest of the questions.

O Learn the directions for each type of math and critical reading question.

O Earn as many points as you can on the easy questions.

O Do your scratchwork in the test book.

General Strategies

O **Skip test questions** – you don't have to answer every question to do well.

O **Work steadily** without wasting time on hard questions – you can always go back to them later.

O **Check your answer sheet regularly** to make sure you are in the right place.

O **Write answers to grid-ins** in the boxes above the ovals.

O **Take a calculator** on test day – one you are familiar with using.

Practice!!

Sentence Completions

Roger said the report was significant; Heather contradicted him, saying that all the information presented was _____ .

(A) contemporary
(B) scintillating
(C) objective
(D) irrevocable
(E) immaterial

Sentence Completions

Roger said the report was significant; Heather contradicted him, saying that all the information presented was _____ .

(A) contemporary
(B) scintillating
(C) objective
(D) irrevocable
(E) immaterial

- Because Heather is contradicting Roger, the correct response is the word that is most nearly the opposite of "significant."
- Choice (E) is correct.
- "Immaterial" means inconsequential or irrelevant.
- Information that is immaterial is by definition not significant.

Passage-Based Questions

<u>Passage Excerpt:</u>
After I left the room, I began to sift my impressions. Only the day before, an acquaintance had warned me to watch carefully for sleight-of-hand tricks, especially as the man had earlier been a stage conjuror.

<u>Question:</u> The "acquaintance" mentioned in line 2 can best be described as a

(A) skeptic
(B) hypocrite
(C) hoaxer
(D) confidant
(E) mystic

Passage-Based Questions

Passage Excerpt:
After I left the room, I began to sift my impressions. Only the day before, an acquaintance had warned me to watch carefully for sleight-of-hand tricks, especially as the man had earlier been a stage conjuror.

Question: The "acquaintance" mentioned in line 2 can best be described as a

(A) skeptic
(B) hypocrite
(C) hoaxer
(D) confidant
(E) mystic

o The acquaintance mentioned in line 2 warns the author to "watch carefully for sleight-of-hand tricks."

o Choice (A) is correct.

o In warning the author to watch out for tricks, the acquaintance is showing that he is skeptical about the telepathist's supposed powers.

Math Section: Multiple Choice

If *ax + bx = 36*, what is the value of x when *a + b = 12?*

(A)   3
(B)   6
(C) 12
(D) 24
(E) 48

Math Section: Multiple Choice

If $ax + bx = 36$, what is the value of x when $a + b = 12?$

(A) 3
(B) 6
(C) 12
(D) 24
(E) 48

The expression $ax + bx$ is equivalent to $(a + b) x$, so the equation $ax + bx = 36$ is equivalent to $(a + b) x = 36$.

When $a + b = 12$, the equation becomes $12x = 36$, which can be solved to get $x = 3$.

Math Section: Student-Produced Response

Know the Student-Produced Response Directions! The correct answer must be **_gridded_** correctly to receive credit. What is written in the boxes is not scored.

If $\dfrac{h}{4} + \dfrac{1}{3} = \dfrac{5h}{6}$, then what is the value of h?

Math Section: Student-Produced Response

Know the Student-Produced Response Directions! The correct answer must be ***gridded*** correctly to receive credit. What is written in the boxes is not scored.

If $\dfrac{h}{4} + \dfrac{1}{3} = \dfrac{5h}{6}$, then what is the value of *h*?

- Multiply each member of the equation by 12 (the common denominator) to get
  $3h + 4 = 10h$

- Subtract 3h from both sides to get $7h = 4$

- Divide by 7

- $h = 4/7$

Student-Produced Responses – Sample Grids

Calculators are Encouraged

A scientific or graphing calculator is recommended.
Bring a familiar calculator. Test day is not the time
to figure out how to use a new calculator.

Writing Skills Section:
Improving Sentences

A few barges still move oil up to Hartford, <u>but in the old days they had more traffic then</u>.

(A) but in the old days they had more traffic then

(B) but in the old days traffic was heavier

(C) but in the old days they had a lot more

(D) whereas the traffic was a lot more in the old days

(E) whereas then there was more traffic in the old days

Writing Skills Section:
Improving Sentences

A few barges still move oil up to Hartford, <u>but in the old days they had more traffic then</u>.

(Note: In this question type, the first choice (A) always repeats the underlined phrase exactly, indicating that there should be no change.)

Choice (B) is correct. It avoids the errors of the original by eliminating both the unnecessary adverb, "then," and the vague pronoun, "they."

(A) but in the old days they had more traffic then

(B) but in the old days traffic was heavier

(C) but in the old days they had a lot more

(D) whereas the traffic was a lot more in the old days

(E) whereas then there was more traffic in the old days

Writing Skills Section:
Identifying Sentence Errors

The electronic computer is a technological triumph that scientists have developed,

mastered, and then put it to constantly   increasing use.   No Error.
    A   B   C   D   E

Writing Skills Section:
Identifying Sentence Errors

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mastered, and then put it to constantly increasing use. No Error.
    A   B   C   D   E

The error in this sentence occurs at (B), where an unnecessary pronoun is used.

The object of the verb "have . . . put" (like the object of the verbs "have developed" and "have . . . Mastered") is the relative pronoun "that," which refers to "technological triumph."

The pronoun "it" is therefore unnecessarily inserted after "put."

Writing Skills Section: Improving Paragraphs

(1) The last century was a time of great technological progress. **(2)** Life is more convenient, comfortable, and efficient today than ever before. **(3)** Yet this has created new concerns.

Which of the following versions of sentence 3 (reproduced below) is most effective?

Yet this has created new concerns.

(A) Although this has created new concerns.

(B) Yet this progress has created new concerns.

(C) Yet these have created new concerns.

(D) Yet this has created new concerns to worry about.

(E) New concerns have been created.

Writing Skills Section: Improving Paragraphs

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(A) Although this has created new concerns.

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(C) Yet these have created new concerns.

(D) Yet this has created new concerns to worry about.

(E) New concerns have been created.

Choice (B) is correct. The vague pronoun "this" is replaced by "this progress," which clearly refers to the progress mentioned in sentence 1.

Test Preparation Strategies

Know How the PSAT/NMSQT Is Scored

Multiple-choice questions:

- 1 point for each correct
- ¼ point deducted for each incorrect

Math grid-ins:

- 1 point for each correct
- 0 points for each incorrect

0 points for omitted questions

Scale:

- 20-80 for each test section

Personalized Skills Information

The PSAT/NMSQT Score Report:

- contains information to help you improve your academic skills.

- lists skills that you have the best chance of improving with additional work.

- includes advice, written by teachers, on how to improve those skills.
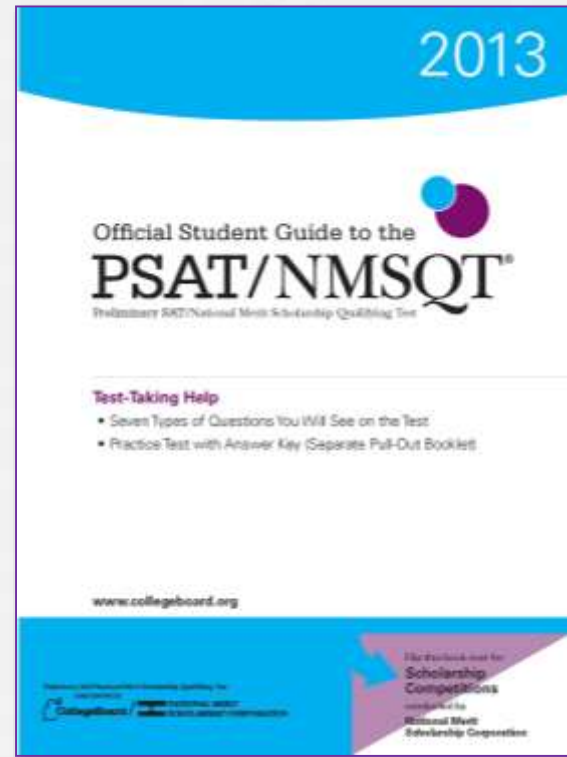
Test Preparation: Long-Term

READ!

- Continuous reading improves vocabulary and develops essential skills.

- Read more books than just those required for class.

Take Challenging Courses!

- This will help you to develop and strengthen your critical thinking skills.

Test Preparation: Short-Term

- Take the practice test in the *Official Student Guide to the PSAT/NMSQT*.

- Understand scoring and "educated guessing."

- Familiarize yourself with the test's format, questions types, and directions.

Test Preparation: Test Readiness Strategies

When you sit down to take the test:

- Read all of the directions.
- Read all of each question's answer choices.
- Do scratch work in the test book.
- Work at a steady pace.

If you skip a question:

- Note it in the test book.
- Leave it blank on the answer sheet.
- Return to it if there is time.
- Remember: you don't have to answer every question to score well.

More Practice

https://www.collegeboard.org/psat-nmsqt/preparation/practice-for-the-test