



How to Choose a Tutor for Standardized Tests

Announcing an upcoming partnership with Khan Academy to provide free online tutoring for the SAT, the College Board has finally acknowledged what was already generally believed: test preparation can raise scores significantly and will continue to do so even for the 2016 version of the test that will be more closely aligned with school curricula.

Students already have available a number of inexpensive online SAT and ACT tutoring options, among them www.eprep.com and www.number2.com, but private tutors express confidence that they will not be put out of business by the new exam as they have not been by the ACT, which is already more closely aligned with the core school curriculum. Why? Because kids are kids and are frequently insufficiently disciplined to put in the work they need to without someone by their side to guide them and urge them on.

With a multitude of tutoring options available, it's helpful for parents to think about what they should look for when choosing one. Many students begin with a class. A class can be helpful to familiarize them with the tests and give them an early sense of where their strengths and weaknesses lie. Also, taking a class together with friends may sometimes increase their motivation. However, when the initial set of classroom lessons is completed, very few students are really at the top of their game, so most benefit from continued preparation. Also, taking a class that follows a set curriculum is probably not the most efficient use of time for students who are simultaneously striving for high grades in the most challenging courses they can handle.

The best tutors will analyze what exactly each student needs help with and can discern the student's thought processes that require correction. The best tutors also know the tests extremely well, having analyzed the types of questions and the frequency with which each type occurs. Additionally, they have identified strategies that can help students tackle the questions they initially find challenging.

These days, with so many students considering both the SAT and the ACT, it's helpful to begin with a tutor who knows both tests and can recommend which one is likely to be best for the particular student.

The tutor's personality is important too. Test anxiety is relatively common, so for some students it's of paramount importance to work with a tutor who understands the problem and is familiar with strategies to combat it. For other students, especially the less academically ambitious, it's helpful to work with a tutor they regard as "cool" because such an individual can serve as a role model and motivate them.

Do what you can to investigate the track record of the tutor or tutoring company, but keep in mind that the ideal tutor will be different for different students, and that some companies train their tutors more extensively than others. If your child can articulate what he or she likes and dislikes in a tutor, pay attention, and look for someone who has worked successfully with similar students.

Finally, if your child has not shown significant ongoing progress with the tutor you're using, don't be afraid to switch. The tutor you've been using may be perfectly good for some other students, but not what your child needs, or at least not what he or she needs any longer; it's simply time to try a different approach.