

DEBT-FREE SCHOLAR

Presents



TIPS ON PREPARING FOR COLLEGE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
What is the most important way high school students should be preparing for college?.....	4
Is the PSAT really very important?.....	9
Would you recommend taking the SAT, ACT, or both?	11
How important is the SAT essay section today?	15
How much of a hindrance will that be for them?	18
What is one way college students can improve their writing skills?	20
Further Reading	23

INTRODUCTION

Preparing for college is a difficult and complicated process. Should I take the SAT or the ACT? What about the PSAT? Answering these questions can be difficult, but, with the proper guidance, they are answerable.

Julie Walker, who has an undergraduate degree in Recreation Administration with a minor in Marketing, serves as marketing director at the [Institute for Excellence in Writing](#) and was involved in producing the [High School Essay Intensive](#), a video course which I [reviewed](#) recently.

Julie and her husband of 25 years homeschooled their three sons from kindergarten through high school.

It is my hope and expectation that this interview will help you prepare better for college.

Respectfully,

Nate Desmond

Editor, DebtFreeScholar.com

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What is the most important way high school students should be preparing for college?

I believe we all have strengths, passions, and callings that give us purpose and fulfillment.

A successful life is one that is devoted to accomplishing goals based on these unique giftings. You would do well to prayerfully consider:

- “What am I good at?”
- “What talents has God given to me that I can use to enrich the lives of others?”
- “What do I need to do to hone these skills to be more effective?”
- “What character flaws do I have that are roadblocks to success?”

Family members, friends, and pastors can all contribute toward helping you find your calling. There are also many helpful books including *StrengthFinders 2.0* and *Do What You Are* that will help both teens and adults discover their talents that weave together and form the tapestry uniquely theirs.

Our society often has us look at what we do not do well and expects to see improvement in those areas. While there is value in having a well-rounded education, no one is good at everything.

For example, I do not understand electricity. As far as I'm concerned, it's magic. I turn on a light switch and, ta-da! The room glows. I've had it explained to me by my engineering dad, my mechanical son, and my musician son who works with electricity in sound design. Nope. Don't get it. Do I care? Am I devastated? Is my life worthless? Of course, the answer is, "I think not."

I am contributing in ways that are God-honoring in my church, in my family, and in my job, using my set of gifts to somehow bring light to this dark and dying world. Am I always patient and kind? Sadly the answer is, “No,” because I lack character. Yet I focus on growing in my strengths and developing better character.

If you are focused solely on improving in your weaknesses, you can become, at best, mediocre in this area. However, when you improve your strengths and character, your good becomes great, and your great becomes significant.

By taking the time to consider this simple question - “What am I good at that I would like to do better?” - a teen may find choosing a college, selecting a major, or pursuing a vocation to pursue much easier.

And if a course was chosen prematurely, I would suggest the adage, “It is easier to navigate a ship when it is moving.” So don’t just sit there and wait for life to happen. Do what you are good at and see if it brings fulfillment, purpose, and success.

Some high school students spend a lot of time studying for the PSAT.

Is the PSAT really very important?

I would suggest that the PSAT, while may not be important, may be helpful in three aspects:

1. It helps students get a feel for what the SAT may be like.
2. The PSAT serves as a National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test, which can lead to scholarships.
3. It also provides a vehicle for colleges and universities to capture students' information for the purpose of recruiting. Love getting those glossy brochures!

Would you recommend taking the SAT, ACT, or both?

First of all, it may be helpful to know the purpose of these tests.

Colleges and universities use these tests as predictors of how well you will do at their school in your freshman year.

Of course, they want to recruit students who do well, graduate, and achieve greatness. Then they can brag about you in their glossy brochures. 😊 Higher scores means you'll likely do well in their school.

However, if you are *not* planning to attend a four-year university right out of high school, you do not need to take these tests! You will transfer in from another school, such as a community college, and the grades you earn will be the indicator of whether or not the college will want to admit you.

Which test you take is mostly a personal decision based on where you live or what your strengths are.

Typically, the SAT and ACT preferences are regional:

If you live west of the Mississippi, you take the SAT, and if you live to the east, you take the ACT.

However, most colleges and universities have qualifiers for both tests. The most important question a student needs to answer to before he makes a decision is, “What are the colleges that I am applying to looking for in their scores?” Use that as the benchmark.

Many students have found that taking the SAT gives them a better score if they have a bent toward mathematics since $\frac{1}{3}$ of the test is dedicated to this area. The ACT mathematics portion is $\frac{1}{4}$ of the score.

However, the ACT also has science portion that the SAT does not, so if students does well in math and science, ½ of the test is directed toward these two areas.

Note: Many schools allow students to retake the tests and use their best scores for the individual sections.

Bottom line: Research both tests. Take advantage of Internet resources and take practice tests and see which best measures your skills, and go from there.

When the timed essay was first added to the SAT in 2005, many experts dismissed it as being too subjective.

How important is the SAT essay section today?

There were many changes made to the SAT test in 2005.

The most significant was increasing the points possible from 1600 to 2400.

The additional 800 points is attributed to the Writing portion, of which an hour of time is allotted to multiple choice responses and 25 minutes to the timed essay. Therefore the essay portion counts for less than half of the SAT Writing score.

While this essay is cumbersome to grade, is an excellent qualifier for students.

Colleges have access to these essays and can read for themselves the type of student they are considering for admittance.

So while the essay may only count for a fraction of the 800 points possible on the Writing assessment, it potentially has further implications than just contributing to your score.

The most significant contribution of the SAT essay, however, is the fact that it compels teachers and students to be more intentional about developing the skills necessary to produce a good essay.

The phrase, “What gets measured gets managed,” attributed to business guru Peter Drucker, sums it up well.

Because an essay is now a required component of the SAT, more teachers and students are motivated to hone their composition skills. Colleges and businesses everywhere rejoice.

Many high school students (and college students for that matter) do not know how to write well.

How much of a hindrance will a lack of writing skills be for them?

I believe whole-heartedly that effective communication is necessary for success in today's culture.

Coupled with good character, excellent communication in speaking and writing will allow you to make a tremendous positive impact in your sphere of influence.

If you are not able to clearly and convincingly communicate your message to your reader, whether it be a paper for your professor or a memo to your business cohort, your educational or career goals will be stifled.

If you don't write well, learn. This is a skill that can be learned.

What is one way college students can improve their writing skills?

One way, huh? Well, that's a tough one.

There are many things a college student can do and they all work together to produce good writing. Forgive me for not suggesting just one way.

- Fill your mind with good thinking, so that when you are asked to write (i.e. think), you have a wealth of knowledge and vocabulary to draw from. (Turn off the TV and pick up a good book!)
- Use a model from which to write. Just like an artist mimics the work of other artists, so should a writer observe and emulate the writings of those who have accomplished a similar task.
- Purchase IEW's *College Bound Student Package* and use your summers and breaks to review the various resources.
- Practice good time management so that you have time to have an editor read your paper days—not hours—before you have to turn it in.

- Write often and don't fall into the texting, emailing, or Twitter trap where your messages are shortened significantly. Although I appreciate the value and convenience of these devices, I find this type of daily writing lends itself to developing bad habits. It will likely migrate into academic assignments. Instead, compose emails with organized thought, complete sentences, cohesive paragraphs, interesting vocabulary, and with a variety of sentence structure. While this type of writing may baffle your friends, it is what your professors are looking for in your papers.

FURTHER READING

For more free college-help ebooks, visit DebtFreeScholar.com/ebooks today.

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