

Building the Boston Test Prep Online SAT Program

Today's students have grown up in a different world. They do not know life without the Internet. They are tech-savvy and fully connected. They spend hours online, talking to friends, playing games, downloading music, and doing homework. Yet, when it comes to preparing for the SAT, these same students move away from the computer screen to sit down with a big newsprint SAT prep book and a box of pencils . . .

So the question is, why should today's student revert back to "their parent's prep" when it comes time to study for the SAT?

This was a question we at Boston Test Prep asked ourselves. And, here's what happened when we did.

Key learning elements. What does the SAT really test?

The truth is that the SAT is really a reflection of two things: knowledge and skills developed in school, and a student's ability to take standardized tests. From the start, we at BTP knew we wanted to create a program that would help students to improve their skills in both areas.

We also spent a lot of time thinking about performance and testing anxiety. Being in unfamiliar situations, not knowing what to expect . . . these are all things that can cause anxiety and can negatively impact a student's performance on any test, especially the SAT. Knowing this, we set out to create a program that would help to decrease a student's anxiety by increasing his or her familiarity, not only with the subject-matter tested, but also with the design of the test itself. In doing so, we would increase students' confidence while also increasing their skills.

Additionally, we wanted to create a product that would be fresh and new. With the College Board's release of the New SAT™ Reasoning Test in the spring of 2006, we knew that most tutors and prep companies would, for very logical and cost-saving reasons, simply repurpose their existing content to address these changes. As the "new kids on the block," we would have the advantage (and challenge) of designing our entire program to align with the content and format of the new SAT.

Lastly, we at BTP were also dedicated to the belief that a well-structured program, designed for today's generation of students, would be engaging. Given the growing body of research on the learning benefits of gaming strategies in education, we would incorporate these concepts to 1) increase motivation by rewarding students for their activity in the program and 2) teach students the test taking strategies they would need to maximize their SAT scores on test-day.

What we created

At Boston Test Prep, we believe in the value of well-designed, learner-centric online learning. The challenge of building a 100% online SAT program for today's students captured our attention.

In the end, we created a 100% pure online test program that provides students with the feedback and support they need to identify and address their weaknesses, improve their skills, and decrease anxiety.

The program was built to accommodate different learning styles and to be flexible enough to meet students at their current skill level by providing both the challenge and support they need. Using both narrated lessons and gaming strategies, the program is designed to build familiarity with the New SAT™ Reasoning Test, while intuitively teaching students the strategies needed to maximize their score on test day.

In short, the Boston Test Prep Online SAT Program is the preparation program for today's student.



What is Build Your Brain™?

Increasingly, educators are using problem-solving based curricula to encourage active learning. By presenting students with a problem and then providing at-the-moment access to the information and tools needed, this teaching model engages students by intuitively providing learning at the moment when they are most ready and willing to learn. We used these learning concepts to design our program.

The Boston Test Prep Online SAT Program was designed using “circular navigation” to allow students to control their own learning. Here’s an example of how it works.

Mark is taking a practice quiz and comes across a question asking him to calculate the 76th term in a sequence. He vaguely remembers learning about sequences months ago, but doesn’t know how to answer the question being asked. This is a moment when Mark both wants and needs to review this math area. Using the “Lesson” button on his screen, Mark can pause the quiz to review a lesson on sets and sequences – the topic being tested. After reviewing the related slides and narration, he is returned to the same sequence question which he can now answer before continuing his quiz. This feature allows students to use quizzes to determine the areas where they need help, and to get that help – at the moment they need it.

Similarly, when students review their past scored quizzes, a button labeled “Lesson” is provided next to each question. If a student answers a question incorrectly and the explanation provided is unclear, the student can access the lesson for additional learning or review. Linking these elements in a circular way encourages the student to engage the system and provides increased learner control, not only over when things are learned, but also how they are learned.

Different students. Different styles.

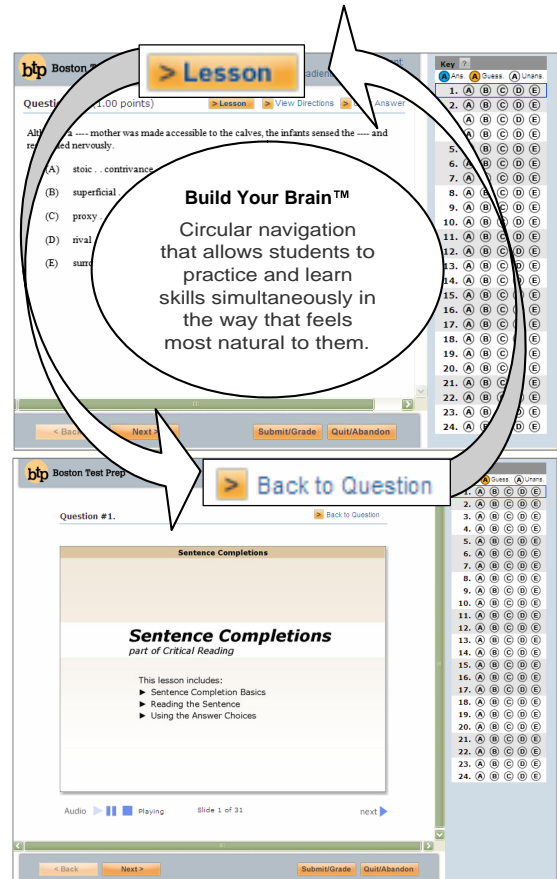
Adreana likes to work methodically. She has a list of topic areas and takes the time to build her skills and learn about an area before testing herself. She is keen on testing well and likes to be prepared.

Brett likes to figure things out as he goes. He tends to jump right in and learns best through trial and error. By testing his skills he finds his weak areas and then works to improve these skills.

Celeste likes to focus on results. She likes to be directed and to receive feedback on her performance. She uses this information to focus her energy and help her improve. She sets targets for herself and then strives to reach these goals.

Students learn differently. Knowing this, we designed the Boston Test Prep Online SAT Program to accommodate different learning styles. Students can take a structured approach (taking lessons and then testing their skills), an organic approach (testing their skills, then pausing to study the areas they find challenging as they go), or a diagnostic approach (taking quizzes to identify weaknesses and then using the results to identify their weakest areas).

Boston Test Prep’s Build Your Brain™ technology allows students to easily link topic area lessons with topic area quizzes allowing students to study what they need to succeed on the SAT, in the way that is most natural for them.



Combating anxiety. Building familiarity.

Generally speaking, anxiety is defined as a state of uneasiness and apprehension caused by uncertainty or the anticipation of a threatening event or situation.

Does that sound like the experience of most students preparing to take the SAT?

There are hundreds of reasons why a student might be anxious or apprehensive about the SAT including the pressures of getting into college, qualifying for a scholarship, competition with classmates, expectations of parents or teachers, or concerns about a specific area of academic difficulty.

The SAT is an unfamiliar experience for most students and each year thousands of students arrive on test day not knowing what to expect or struggling with self-doubt about their knowledge and test-taking skills. To decrease this anxiety and build student confidence, the BTP Online Test Prep Program was built to continually improve students academic and test taking abilities, while simultaneously building familiarity with the test. The program first tears down a student's fear of the "unknown" by introducing and explaining the overall design and format of the test. Students then learn about the scoring and timing of the test. Each of the eight question types is also introduced and the directions and strategies for each type of question they will encounter on test day are presented.

Additionally, the program contains more than 2,200 SAT prep questions specifically written to emulate the language, style, and difficulty of actual SAT questions.

The Eight Question Types

1. Math multiple-choice
2. Math grid-ins
3. Sentence Completion
4. Reading Passages
5. Error Recognition
6. Sentence Improvement
7. Paragraph Improvement
8. Written Essay

What are BTP Prep Points?

Just knowing the content tested on the SAT and decreasing test anxiety is not enough to ensure a high score. (If it were, then every straight "A" student would receive a perfect score of 2,400 points!) In addition to academic skill and ability, success on the SAT is also a reflection of a student's ability to take standardized tests. Therefore, the Boston Test Prep Online SAT Program was also designed to intuitively teach students to use their knowledge of the SAT's design to maximize points earned.

On the SAT, students who focus on answering 100% of the questions will more than likely hurt their score. It is likely they will be rushed, attempt to answer questions beyond their skill level, and make careless errors in the haste to fill every bubble on their answer sheet. A better strategy for most students is learning which questions to answer, which to leave blank, and when to guess. This knowledge helps students to maximize the number points earned from correct answers and minimize the number of points lost to incorrect answers, which results in higher SAT scores.

To encourage students to improve their SAT test-taking skills and to illustrate the impact of correct, incorrect, and skipped questions, BTP Prep Points were introduced. The points are awarded in the same way as SAT points but are inflated by a factor of 100. As students practice with SAT preparation quizzes, they earn (and lose) points, based on these results. By improving their knowledge and skills and applying the SAT test-taking strategies presented in the program, students increase their ability to earn points. As students sharpen their skills and build their weaknesses, they are able to answer a greater number of questions correctly. And by learning SAT design tips and strategies they learn to maximize their points by decreasing the number of points they lose to incorrect answers and careless mistakes.

How is the SAT scored?

The SAT is a negatively scored standardized test. Students lose points for questions answered incorrectly.

correct = earn 1 point
incorrect = lose 1/4 point
unanswered = 0 points

BTP Points also provide students with additional point-related incentives and motivators for preparing. For example, when students earn 15,000 points, they can redeem these points for a movie ticket with Fandango, the nation's largest online and phone movie ticketing service. As their points accumulate, there are also different Brain Building Levels that students can work toward. Students can even compete with friends to achieve higher BTP Prep Point levels. All the while, the strategies helping them to maximize their BTP Prep Points are reinforcing the score-maximizing strategies

necessary for improving their SAT score.

Teaching Students to Write an SAT Essay

The Written Essay is one of the most significant changes to the New SAT™ Reasoning Test and one of the areas of greatest concern. Like other SAT Preparation providers, BTP spent a lot of time thinking about how best to help students prepare for this new section of the test.

The College Board's SAT readers are instructed to evaluate student essays based on the "overall impression" each essay creates. This is referred to as Holistic Grading. What it means is that although many factors are considered, there is no specific area that is the "make or break" factor.

The program introduces students to the parts of the essay question, explains how the essay score is determined using the College Board's scoring "rubric," and provides a detailed breakdown of the criteria considered when using this scoring standard. The program also teaches students about the Guidelines for Holistic Grading given to SAT readers and provides tools and exercises students can use to practice and develop their writing assessment skills.

The Boston Test Prep Online SAT Program also includes a series of lessons designed to help students improve their writing skills. For students who are concerned about their writing ability, there is a narrated writing demonstration lesson designed to walk them through the writing process. In this lesson, students are taught how to 1) approach and prepare, and 2) write an SAT essay.

In this lesson, both the lesson narrator and the student are given a sample SAT essay question. Throughout the lesson, the narrator demonstrates each step of the writing process, before pausing to allow students to repeat the step on their own. The first part of the lesson teaches students how to take a stand on the topic or question presented, brainstorm appropriate examples to support this stand, and then create a thesis sentence and outline. The second writing section of the lesson teaches students how to construct a succinct and powerful argument using a five-paragraph essay format.

For students who feel more confident with their writing ability, but could still use some additional pointers, a second lesson is provided with tips for writing powerfully and succinctly. This lesson helps students avoid common writing mistakes that can leave readers with a poor impression of their essay.

Our Goal

At BTP, we have one goal: providing a premium SAT preparation program designed for today's students. Our 100% pure online program allows students to learn when they need to know, in the way they want. It provides an intuitive system for assessing preparation while teaching students both the academic and test-taking skills necessary to succeed on the New SAT™ Reasoning Test.

If you have additional questions, or if you would like to learn more about purchasing the Boston Test Prep Online SAT Program for your child or school, please visit our website at www.bostontestprep.com or call us directly at 800-448-0671.

