

***Annihilate the ACT<sup>®</sup> &  
Subjugate the SAT<sup>®</sup> :***  
**The Easy New Way to Read,  
Annotate & Dominate Texts**

By Karin McKie, MFA ©2019

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*Underlined words indicate websites referenced, and those URL's are listed at the end of the book.*

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*For Mickie Moe and the educators in my family:  
Laura McKie, Deborah McKie, Alan McKie, Samuel  
McKie, Muriel Adams, Olena Adams, Eleanor  
Schmidt, Tom Adams, Sr., Tom Adams, Jr.,  
Susan Adams and Nancy Carr Rogers Adams*





# About the Author

I'm a communicator. A writer, publicist, actor, speaker, educator. A human Grammarly.

I've been tutoring students and adults for decades, focusing on all aspects of critical reading, creative writing, and holistic thinking. I offer in-person and online tutoring, from single sessions to comprehensive packages, to prepare for the ACT, SAT, AP, SAT Subject and other standardized tests, as well as assistance for writing Common Application college and other types of essays.

I have a Communications and Theater BA, and a Creative Writing MFA. I run my own communications company, Tree Falls Productions. I'm the daughter of a cultural anthropologist, the retired education director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, and the Federal Communications Commission's retired deputy managing director so communications is in my blood. My sister, grandmother and grandfather, great-aunts and aunts are teachers and principals so education is a family value. Plus, I live on School Street, so, I mean, come on.

I grew up outside DC's Beltway, have lived in London, Amsterdam, and the Bay Area, have taught and performed in Edinburgh and around the Americas, and was a China and Taiwan Global Technology Initiative Scholar, touring Beijing, Shanghai and Hangzhou, including Tsinghua, Tongji, Zhejiang and National Central universities.

As a SAG-AFTRA actor, I play a COPA officer in episodes #610 and #613 on NBC's *Chicago PD*. I spent Y2K in Buenos Aires, and now I'm a Windy City culture vulture. I like dogs and cats, yoga and weight lifting, acting and activism, as well as narrative nonfiction. I'm an occasional barefoot tennis player.

Please visit [KarinMcKie.com](http://KarinMcKie.com) for more information, and to contact me to see how I can help you forge your future with everything English!

# References



"Karin's tips and tricks are unlike anything I have learned online, from test prep books and other tutoring services. She was able to greatly improve my score. And Karin is the perfect partner for generating standout essays!" – Tara S., ACT score up 7 points

"On the most recent SAT I got a 1110!!!! My highest score yet. I'm so happy." Sydney B., SAT score up 230 points

"Karin is one of the most intelligent, entrepreneurial, and encouraging people I have ever met." – Jina B., GRE score up 7 points

After only three sessions with Karin, "Nicholas got into Whitney Young, which was his first choice. His total score was 891 [out of 900]. Thanks for your help." – Nicholas' dad, Harvey, Selective Enrollment High School Entrance Exam

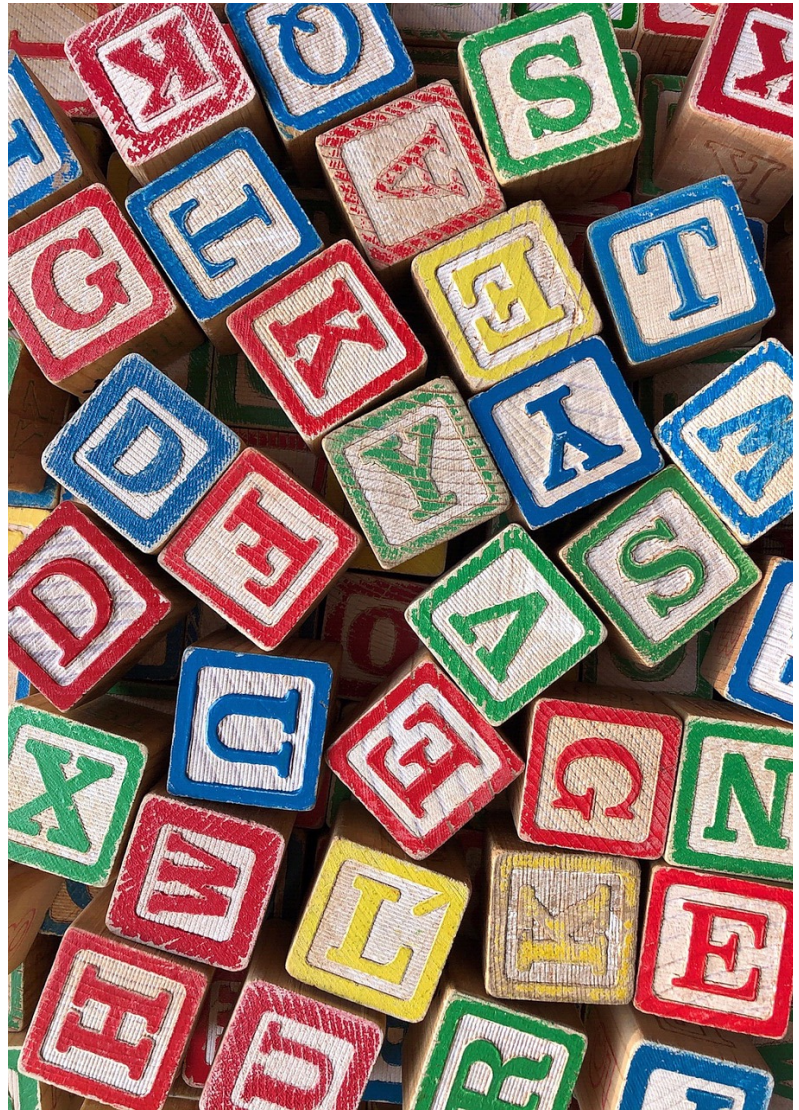
"I studied with Karin McKie to prepare for my GRE test. Her holistic approach to learning was a tremendous asset to test prep as well as overall reading, annotation and comprehension skills." – Cade Y., GRE test prep

"The feedback we got from students and parents was phenomenal - they loved her pedagogy!" – Purvi Ruparel, Insight Education

"I recommend Karin because of her diverse expertise and invaluable advice. She gives you the tools and confidence you need to share your voice." – Kathryn B., Common App college essay

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# Welcome!

I've been teaching my whole life. In third grade, I mentored kindergarteners. I've taught theater and coached improvisation, shared marketing and public relations strategies with college students and adults, and, since the 2000s, I've focused on critical reading and creative writing, for ACT, SAT, Subject Tests, AP, ISEE and GRE test prep, as well as for work and life.

Communication connects us so English is everything. When teaching test prep, I always start with reading. After all, math is just reading with numbers in it, and the science section of the ACT is just English peppered with scientific notation and Latin words.

Ipsa facto, this book will focus on reading and a special strategy I've developed over the decades that consistently yields deeper comprehension and score improvements.

I'll also share some suggestions for STEM areas and the overall college selection process.

I offer to be what *The Atlantic* calls your great teacher.

# Why?

WHY are you doing this?

Because your tiger/helicopter/loving parents are making you, probably. But you will carry these skills with you throughout your life. These tests are a preview of what you'll be studying in college, and likely life. Remember that:

- You want to do well on the test to get into a good college.
- You want to get into a good college so you can find your dream job.
- You want to land a dream job so you can make money.
- Most importantly, you want to be happy.



So there's a reason 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades are such tough years. A lot depends on your score. But it also doesn't define you.

Plan on taking the test a second, or maybe a third, time, as a pressure release value. Some colleges also *superscore* the ACT and SAT, and average your best scores from several tests to create a new composite score. Look into that.



# How?

HOW are you doing this?

I recommend ACT/SAT test prep should occur:

- two hours per session
- twice a week
- for two or three months



Or as close to that as possible. In my experience, that commitment produces score increases around:

- 100+ points for SAT scores
- 3+ points for ACT
- 7+ points for GRE

The summer between 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades is the best time to prepare for these standardized tests, when there's less homework and fewer commitments. Map out a schedule among vacations and other activities. Relaxing and recharging is also a vital part of summer, but plan to fit in the below (and more) among the fun:

- workbook study (any imprint)
- [Khan Academy videos](#)
- regularly scheduled practice tests from [CrackACT](#) and [CrackSAT](#)

[The College Board](#) also has ten full SATs online.

A close-up photograph of several green ivy leaves on a brown branch. The leaves are heart-shaped with prominent veins. The background is dark and out of focus.

SECTION 1

# College Selection & Application Tips

Talk to your high school guidance counselors. They're the pros. Download some free OpenStax textbooks and start studying.

Pick your dream schools. Ascertain what your family can afford, and whether you want a public or private, large or small, urban or rural environment. Ivy League schools are swell, but decide if the name is worth the price. Quality education is available everywhere.

Fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Seek inclusive education.

Choose around five schools:

- three solid choices
- one reach
- one safety



“Demonstrate interest” in those schools. Respond quickly to those emails and click their links because colleges are checking (and mind your social media presence). Timeliness, respect and authenticity remain key, as ever.

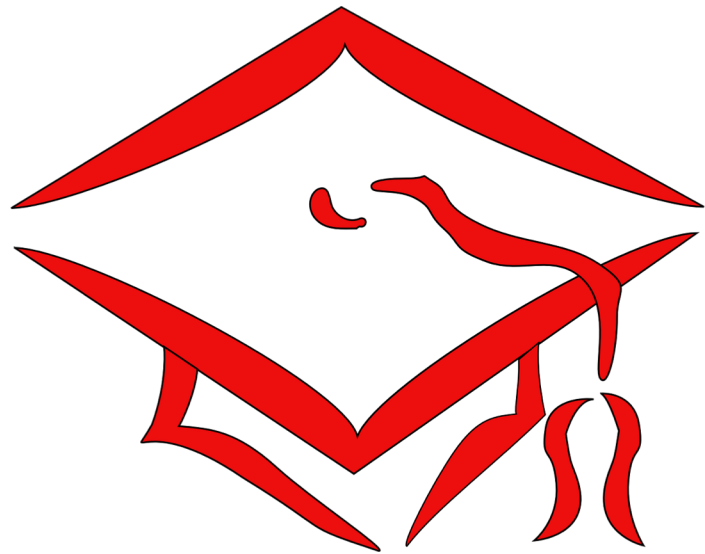
Decide on your major(s). You can always change your mind, but it's helpful to start with a tangible career path on which to focus your college searches and application essays.

Research the schools' ACT/SAT/GPA requirements at PrepScholar. Learn about early decision versus early action.

Visit dream schools the summers after 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grades, in person or at least virtually. Talk to those professors and current students. Trust your gut. Talk to friends and family members who have gone or are going to your dream schools.

See if your dream colleges recommend or require SAT Subject Tests. Some colleges like the University of Chicago are moving towards only requiring Subject Tests rather than the ACT/SAT. If you're taking AP/IB/Honors classes, take the SSTs as soon as possible afterwards, while the info is still fresh. These tests are cheaper, and several can be taken in one day. SAT Subject Tests are offered in:

- Math 1
- Math 2
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Physics
- English Literature
- US History
- World History
- Spanish, also with listening
- French, also with listening
- German, also with listening
- Chinese with listening
- Japanese with listening
- Korean with listening
- Modern Hebrew
- Italian
- Latin



It's better to have the tests taken and not need them, rather than vice versa.

Check the SAT Subject Test website for test dates, and note that language with listening tests are usually only offered once a year, in November. Try the online practice links there to check your current skill set.

Make sure you have a calculator that passes ACT/SAT standards and practice using it plenty of times at home before you take it into the test.

Use, borrow or purchase a wristwatch to time yourself. Wear it on the inside of your wrist so it's near the test as you're working. If you have a dive watch, use the rotating dial to track time. You never know if the proctor will give you a time warning, or if there will be a clock in the room where you're testing. Or if that clock is keeping accurate time, or if it will be in front of you. If the clock is behind you, don't keep turning around because that could look suspicious. Get used to not using a phone to check time since you can't bring one into the test.

Set up an account and collect your school list on [CommonApp.org](https://CommonApp.org), where most colleges require you apply, and where you can also see what supplemental applications might be needed in addition to the main 650-word entry essay. Look on sites like Johns Hopkins University [here](#) – read those successful essays and emulate.

The ACT and SAT are important, but the college essay is also key, and admissions officers put more weight on your GPA, volunteer experiences and other extracurriculars so don't neglect those values and activities.





SECTION 2

# ACT & SAT Test Prep Tips

Should you take the ACT or SAT? Review the subtle differences between the two, then take practice tests for both the ACT and SAT. The ACT Reading section is easier, with cleaner paragraphs and more white space for annotation. The ACT uses a different lettering system: A, B, C, and D are joined by F, G, H and J. The Math section of the ACT offers five, rather than four, multiple choice answers. See which one you like better, and achieve the best score. Some high-scoring SAT students who plateau on the SAT can often score higher on the ACT. Also see if your dream schools have a preference.

To prepare for either test, I recommend tutoring for two-hour sessions, twice a week, for two to three months, or a similar schedule. Start with a practice test as a baseline and diagnostic. Plan on taking four or five more practice tests during that period, every 10 days or so, after you feel like you've learned something, to track your retention and progress. Take your last practice test no closer than a week before the actual test: you don't run a marathon the week before an actual marathon. This is a mind marathon.

The best prep? Read. On a daily basis. Anything. As long as it's professional and in English. Read for pleasure. If you like sports, read *Sports Illustrated*. Or read a gaming magazine if you're a gamer. If you're not sure what to read, ask your school or local librarian for recommendations, e.g. "I used to love magic and fantasy stories. What are the 11<sup>th</sup> grade *Harry Potter*-type books?" For test prep purposes, don't read blogs. Consume higher level reading with editorial oversight.

In addition to books you like, also read the Article of the Day on *The New York Times* Learning Network, the student portal of the newspaper. This site is SAT-focused, offering pre-reading questions similar to the tests, and shares excellent writing at around a tenth grade level (most public writing hovers around the fifth grade level). Also search the NYTLN for your favorite actor, singer or sports star so you can become more knowledgeable about your interests and a better conversationalist (handy for college interviews!). You will also learn how to construct vibrant sentences (handy for essay writing!).

The site also offers quizzes, crosswords and contests to activate your test prep brain, as well as writing prompts plus tips on how to raise a reader.

Read other higher-level news outlets as well, such as *The Washington Post* and *The New Yorker*. Consider subscribing as you prepare for these tests. Find and consume a variety of publications such as:

- [American Scientist](#)
- [The Atlantic](#)
- [The Economist](#)
- [Foreign Affairs](#)
- [The Nation](#)
- [National Geographic](#)
- [Popular Science](#)
- [Scientific American](#)
- [Smithsonian Magazine](#)
- [The Wall Street Journal](#)



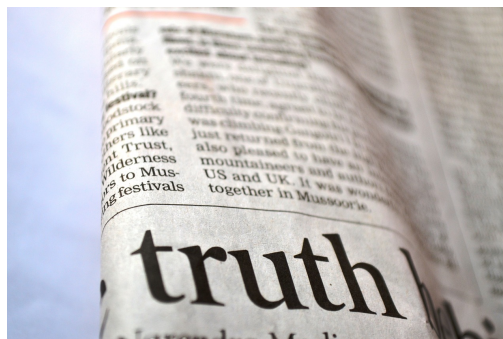


Read famous speeches. There's often a speech in the test's reading section. Remember that speeches often have repetition, since they're written for a listening audience, and use emotion to persuade. Note those techniques for deeper understanding.

Whenever you come across a word you don't know, anywhere, whether it's a wrong answer or not, write it down in your vocabulary notebook or on a flashcard. Look it up, listen to the pronunciation, then write down a simple synonym. Practice vocabulary on an app or a site like Free Rice.

Quiz yourself. Research a variety of topics. Check your "Bioknowledgey."

Drill the building blocks of language, Greek and Latin roots. If you know 100 roots, you can guess at thousands of other words. The hat trick of reading, studying vocab and roots will take you far.



Just read. Colleges will be impressed by your intellectual curiosity, and vivid vocabulary and idioms will seep into your expressions. Be prepared to answer "what did you just read" or "what is your favorite book" at college or internship interviews. Read what you like and that will help you with what you might find more difficult or dry, like the passages in the ACT and SAT.

# Test Prep Tips:

- Take a practice test on Khan, CrackACT.com or CrackSAT.net
  - Baseline for where you are
  - Diagnostic for where to study
- See what scores your dream schools require
- Collect your schools on CommonApp.org
- Check if your schools require SAT Subject Tests
- Read regularly
  - Read challenging materials like on the New York Times Learning Network
  - Look up and write down any new vocabulary
  - Study Greek and Latin roots
  - Study grammar at Khan and owl.purdue.edu

The background of the page is a dense, overlapping pattern of red triangles. Each triangle has a thick red border and a white center containing a black question mark. The triangles are oriented in various directions, creating a complex, geometric texture.

SECTION 3

# Study & Test Tips

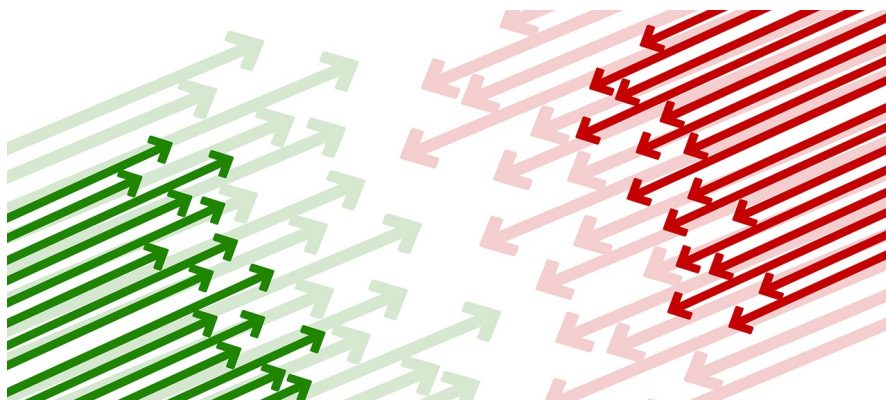
Making mistakes is awesome. On your practice exams. Then you'll know where to focus your studying. Take a practice test first to get a baseline score and create a diagnostic roadmap to drill down on weaker areas. Let mistakes be your teachers.

Remain positive. Don't say "I have no idea about this." Instead, add YET:

➤ "I don't know about colons YET."

Positive thinking and a willingness to learn are crucial to reading and test success.

Think like a hero, not a victim.



Focus on your trouble areas with a tutor, workbook, on Khan Academy. Watch the videos then complete the accompanying practice worksheets. Make a grammar deep dive at Purdue University's Online Writing Lab, OWL.

Preparing for these tests is an opportunity to learn concepts you never learned, or remember ideas that you've learned but have forgotten. Use this opportunity to review topics that you've been afraid to admit that you've never known.

While you're taking the test, here's some quick tips:

- **Reading:** read the title; pre-mark the questions; annotate as you read; if an answer is 50% wrong, it's 100% wrong.
- **Writing and Language/English:** keep an eye out for wordiness and redundancy; when in doubt, shorter is better (except if all the answers are vague – you might choose longer for more detail).
- **Writing:** use the same reading annotation techniques; intros and conclusions should be similar, and about 2-3 sentences each; body paragraphs should have context, evidence and analysis.
- **Math:** work quickly but carefully; read the actual question twice to make sure you're answering what they're asking (do they want "x" or "xy"?); "3 second rule" (if you don't know how to begin a problem during that time, just pick your go-to letter and move on).
- **Science:** this is the only section where you should skip around, leaving difficult sections for the end; don't necessarily read the text first, instead scan the charts/graphs/tables, then go directly to questions. This final ACT section is actually more reading than science.

Don't second guess. Use these tips to make good choices then move to the next question. We'll take a deeper dive into reading techniques and strategies in the following chapters, including sharing a proven technique to understand reading, even with boring or archaic passages.

We'll also focus on annotation techniques so you'll only have to read the passage once and have better retention for the questions. All these tips and tricks will help you move from blind guessing to educated guessing or better. Please purchase the full version of this book to get test prep tips from the trenches, and join hundreds of other students who have gained confidence and increased scores. Learn strategies from decades of teaching, including the "secret sauce" for annotation and reading retention skills for the tests, school and life.

Visit [KarinMcKie.com](http://KarinMcKie.com) to  
Purchase the Entire Book

