



Major Changes to the SAT

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by [Janet Rosier](#), *IECA Professional Member (CT)*

As Yogi Berra famously said, “It’s Déjà vu all over again.” The College Board announced a major overhaul to the SAT exam. Seems like it was just yesterday that they announced a major overhaul to the SAT exam that included the new Writing section with an essay and the new scores would be calculated on a scale of 200-800 for each of the three parts, for a total of 2,400 possible points. That was in 2004 and the exam was in place for the high school class of 2006.

Yesterday, the College Board announced that the new SAT would go back to the old way of scoring—two parts for a total score of 1,600—and drop the Writing section and the essay would become optional, in time for the Class of 2017.

Optional. Before we all say goodbye to the Writing section I wonder what the colleges will have to say about this. The College Board announced in 2008 that they would implement a new concept, “Score Choice,” which would allow students to select which sitting of the three-part exam they wanted to send to the colleges. No longer would it be a matter of all SATs you have taken automatically going to the colleges you applied to. The fear of one bad Saturday morning having an outsized impact on college decisions was gone. Sweet relief. Until about six months later when some colleges balked at the new policy and said they wanted to see all scores. Period. That led to what we have today—some colleges require all scores of all sittings and some allow score choice. When students go to send their scores to the colleges, the rule for that college will come up and the student knows what to send. Still, it causes great angst for students.

Although many colleges did not consider the score for the Writing section, some did. Will colleges resist this change? Only some of them? Will students have to know which colleges will require the “optional” writing before even signing up for the exam? The ACT, the College

Board's competition in college admissions testing, already has an optional Writing section, but if you read the test requirements of many of the competitive colleges, it is "SAT and 2 Subject Tests or ACT with Writing." For my students, I tell them if they are taking the ACT, take it with the optional Writing.

The dropping of the essay wasn't the only change to the test but it was the big news that got the headlines. The irony is that all of this tweaking is for an exam that has little predictive value. According to this recently released study, "Defining Promise: Optional Standardized Testing Policies in American College and University Admissions," test scores did not predict college success. Quoting from this *Washington Post* article about the study, "*A three-year national study of colleges that do not require applicants to submit ACT or SAT scores found only "trivial" differences in the college graduation rates or the cumulative grade point average of students between those who do and those who do not send in their standardized test results.*" The number of test optional colleges has been growing. What impact will the new changes in the SAT have?