

Scholastic Aptitude Test Preparation for the Adolescent Dyslexic

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Residual signs characteristic of a specific language disability, such as vocabulary deficits, trouble differentiating between literal and figurative words, difficulty paraphrasing a reading selection, and problems with abstract reasoning make it arduous for dyslexic adolescents to demonstrate their maximum potential on the verbal section of the Scholastic Aptitude Test. This paper illustrates ways in which SAT skills can be enhanced through a structured program of vocabulary development, an understanding of test taking strategies for specific SAT questions, and the learning of a pattern of analysis to improve reading comprehension. It includes case studies, as well as a discussion of the types of special test arrangements available for dyslexic students.

Introduction

The admonition "Practice makes perfect" applies equally to the youth taking music lessons or learning a new sport as it does to the adolescent preparing to take the SATs. Those who have taken piano lessons remember daily practice sessions required if they expected to play perfectly at the next lesson. Practice, to be effective, is not a last minute surge, but occurs over a period of time, if the goal is excellence. Successful practice incorporates the right techniques. No matter how long a child sits at the piano, unless he practices the right notes, his lesson will not be perfect. If a baseball player's stance at the plate remains uncorrected, no matter how often he tries to swing, he will continue to miss the ball. Practice can make perfect when we practice ap-

propriate and correct techniques. To ensure that practice does improve skills, the budding pianist, the ball player, and the student need good coaches.

Type of Test Administration

Since 1938, handicapped students have been eligible for special administration of the SATs. Blind and visually-impaired students were the first handicapped students for whom special test provisions were made (Bennett, Rock, and Kaplan 1985). Now federal regulations mandate equal access to testing programs for all students. To comply with this regulation, the Educational Testing Service and the American College Testing Program now offer testing modifications to provide for the needs of all handicapped examinees. Special conditions may include braille, large type, use of a cassette recorder, a reader, or amanuensis, extended time, or a combination of any of these accommodations. Students whose Individual Educational Plan so states are entitled to special test administration. The College Board indicates that the presence of an undiagnosed learning disability does not necessarily qualify the student for services to the handicapped. If a student qualifies, his high school counselor must arrange for the special administration with Admissions Testing Program (ATP) services for handicapped students. Students who elect to take the SATs under these conditions should be informed that their ATP scores will include the designation, "non-standard administration." This is the report that will be sent to the student's college. Although various special accommodations are offered by the admissions testing program, only a small percentage of handicapped students appear to take advantage of these services. Bennett (1984) reports that of the approximately 50,000 handicapped freshmen entering college, only 6,000 requested special administration of the SATs. He attributes the small proportion of handicapped students taking special administrations of admissions tests to three reasons:

- 1) Some handicapped students prefer to take the test under the same conditions as their nondisabled peers because they do not need special arrangements or because they wish to compete on an equal footing with the general population.
- 2) The student's choice of colleges does not require test scores as part of the admissions process, so handicapped applicants may not consider it necessary to test under nonstandard administration.
- 3) Handicapped students may not use special accommodations because they are unaware that such opportunities exist.

Untimed Administration

Bennett and Ragosta (1985) note significant performance disparities on the SAT between the learning-disabled population and the general test-taking population. They propose that the existence of these differences may disproportionately affect disabled examinees in the college admissions testing process. They hypothesize that the differences suggest time limits affect disabled students more than the general test-taking population. The advantages of timed versus untimed administration of the SAT should be considered. Centra (1986) reports that extended time administration for handicapped examinees results in improved test performance on the SAT-Verbal, SAT-Math, and Test of Standard Written English (TSWE). Average gains of disabled students were generally between 30–38 points on the SAT, but 15 percent of the students increased their scores over 100 points, and another 26 to 30 percent gained 60 to 100 points. From 3 to 7 percent, on the other hand, decreased their scores by at least 50 points. Centra notes that students who took more time on the test tended to record larger score gains and that those who spent more than five and a half hours received the highest score gains. Centra hypothesizes that the extended time provided to handicapped students allows them to read and respond to many more test items than they would have under standard administration. He concludes that the additional time may compensate for the examinees' impairment.

Needs Based Curriculum

Experts appear to agree that preparation for the SATs should be a continuous process. Studies by Rawson (1977), Ansara (1972), and Hagin (1984) indicate that dyslexics can go to college and be successful. How should their preparation for college and especially for the SATs differ from that of the student who does not have a language impairment? Ansara indicates that overlearning can bring college within the dyslexic's grasp. She recommends that dyslexics with above average ability attain skills above grade level to ensure academic success. The dyslexic usually cannot memorize huge quantities of facts. Greenwood, Morris, and Morgan (1983) suggest that the college preparatory program for the dyslexic student stress patterns of analysis, instead of rote learning. They recommend that instruction emphasize concepts and patterns, for when students see meaning in information, they can retain it longer. They suggest a successful strategy to teach dyslexic adolescents should have these five components: individualization, student involvement, student responsiveness, a multisensory approach, and constant reinforcement. Those responsible for conducting the SAT review should consider the characteristics of language-disabled adoles-

cents: organizational weakness; trouble formulating ideas; poor summarization ability; difficulty with abstract reasoning; and an inability to understand the difference between literal and figurative words (de Hirsch 1984).

Test Format

It is important for the student to understand the format of the SAT. Each verbal section of the SAT contains questions from the following categories: 1) Antonyms; 2) Analogies; 3) Sentence Completion; and 4) Reading Comprehension Passages. Excluding the experimental section, (which may be a verbal, math or TSWE section used for future tests), the SAT includes two 30-minute verbal sections made up as follows.

Students preparing for the SAT need to know that all questions in the first three sections are arranged so that the first third of the questions are easy and that the last third are the most difficult. Knowing this gives students a strategy for recognizing where and how to guess and how to apply the process of elimination. The student should also understand how the test is scored: each student receives a base score of 200 points; each correct verbal answer adds approximately 7 points. Blank answers receive no score, but about 2 points are deducted for each incorrect answer. The highest score a student can receive on 85 questions is 85 times 7, or approximately 600. Adding this to the base score of 200 points gives a perfect score of 800 points. Consequently, a student who is aiming at a verbal score of 500 has to answer correctly only 42 questions to receive that score.

Case Studies

Jeff, a junior in a public high school college preparatory program, was diagnosed as dyslexic in first grade by Hagin. He had received

Table I	
Verbal Section Diagram	
Type I	Type II
10 Antonyms	15 Antonyms
5 Sentences	5 Sentences
10 Analogies	10 Reading Questions
15 Reading Questions	5 Sentences
	10 Analogies
40 Verbal Questions	45 Verbal Questions
85 Total Questions	

Two months later, Nancy scored a 420 on a facsimile exam, correctly answering 35, erring on 5 responses, and omitting 45. Her overall improvement in each of the sections was 36 percent in analogies, 54 percent in sentence completion, 13 percent in reading comprehension, and 27 percent in antonyms (see Table IV).

Skill Development

Antonyms and analogies are included as vocabulary items in the SAT, while sentence completions and reading passages are contained in the reading comprehension text. SAT verbal scores have shown a dramatic decline in the past 20 years from an average of approximately 500 to a low of 425 in 1979 and 1980. Many reasons for this decline have been advanced, but the fact that students now read less than they once did probably plays a role. The long-term solution to weak verbal skills is a serious reading program over an extended period of time. Dyslexic students, on the other hand, whose reading is often impaired by poor

Table IV

Item Analysis						
Name: Nancy						
Date: June 12, 1986						
SAT FORM CODE 41F						
VERBAL 420-UNTIMED						
Antonyms			Sentence Completion			
✓	X	0	✓	X 0		
4	—	6 III (1-10)	2	3 III (11-15)		
4	1	10 I (1-15)	2	1 2 II (16-20)		
8	1	16 $7\frac{3}{4}/25 = 31\%$	3	0 2 (31-35)		
Reading Comprehension			Analogies			
✓	X	0	✓	X 0		
6	1	8 III (26-40)	6	— 4 III (16-25)		
3	2	5 I (21-30)	5	— 5 I (36-45)		
9	3	13 $8\frac{3}{4}/25 = 33\%$	11	— 9 11/20 = 55%		
			6/12/86	4/10/86	1/17/86	Diff.
1.	Analogies		55%	38%	19%	+36%
2.	Sentence Completions		45%	45%	-9%	+54%
3.	Reading Comprehension		33%	34%	20%	+13%
4.	Antonyms		31%	21%	4%	+27%

decoding skills, do not read for pleasure as often as their nondisabled peers. Such long-term vocabulary deficits suggest that the verbal scores of the SATs are more difficult to improve than the math scores because the verbal scores in the final analysis are limited to the depth of the student's vocabulary. The problems dyslexic adolescents face in vocabulary development are associated with deficits in rote memory retrieval (de Hirsch 1984). Because of their difficulties with high-level abstract reasoning, dyslexic students' verbal definitions are often more concrete.

Vocabulary Improvement

In the long run, there are five ways of improving one's vocabulary. I recommend that vocabulary instruction for dyslexics include the associative process, with an emphasis on mental imagery. Multimodal images relevant to the student's lifestyle are beneficial as a memory aid. Researchers at Harvard University (Kosslyn 1986) indicate that using imagery to jog memory is one of several vastly underused ways in which the use of mental images may be helpful. While admitting that mental imagery is an underused mental ability, Kosslyn suggests that with training and practice people can improve their image-making capacity immensely. For example, when Jeff (see the first case study above) was preparing for his SATs, one of the words he encountered was *sedulous*, which means working hard and steadily, in a diligent manner. When asked to conjure a visual image for this particular word, Jeff envisioned himself behind the lawnmower as he struggled to manure the acres of green grass on a lonely cemetery knoll. Jeff could almost feel the sweat pouring off his back which he then, in turn, associated with the word *sedulous*. *Sedulous* is a word which has been used as a past SAT vocabulary item and is considered to be a college level term. Because Jeff applied the multimodal imagery to *sedulous*, it is a word he has integrated into his vocabulary.

From early childhood, students should be encouraged to listen to their parents, to their teachers, friends, public speakers, and television commentaries. Mature vocabulary, rather than baby talk accustoms a youngster to such terminology and encourages its use.

Reading and learning vocabulary through context is the third way to improve one's vocabulary. This is the preferred solution to weak verbal skills and best carried out in a program over a long period of time. One-half hour a day of reading the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal* editorial pages will improve reading and vocabulary scores, as well as raise the student's awareness of current events.

The fourth method of vocabulary study is etymology, the study of roots, suffixes and prefixes, the structure of a word. Students who have received language training through the Orton-Gillingham method are most familiar with this type of study. Their skills may be

improved when they learn the different meanings of roots, suffixes, and prefixes. While dyslexic students do not always excel in learning a new foreign language, I usually recommend Latin if there is a language requirement for graduation. Proficiency in Latin contributes to a student's understanding of etymology.

The fifth and least recommended way of increasing one's vocabulary is through the memorization of word lists. For a dyslexic student who may have great difficulty memorizing material and retrieving words from memory, this is often an unsatisfactory method. If the vocabulary to be memorized is carefully selected, perhaps the 200 most common words used in the SATs, and the methods of mental imagery, as previously mentioned, are employed, this method may have some merit. Several word lists are available from any of the SAT preparation books.

The Antonym Question

Rock, Bennett, and Kaplan (1985) indicate that the antonym item may measure something in addition to general verbal reasoning ability, that is, the ability to shift mental gears quickly, especially for the learning-disabled population. Success in answering the antonym question depends largely on knowing the meaning of words and then being able to arrive quickly at the most exact opposite meaning. Students who are deficient in language skills and have difficulty differentiating between literal and figurative words have to be shown in a structured manner how to determine the best antonym for a given word.

Strategy

Instruct the student to read the word in capital letters first, determine its meaning, and anticipate the word's opposite meaning. Next, the student may consider all given answer choices before making a final selection. I caution students not to waste time if a question is initially too difficult for them. In the instances where the student knows the meaning of the word in capital letters, but isn't sure of the correct answer, I suggest trying to eliminate at least two of the answer choices and then to consider the three remaining choices carefully, trying to establish a hierarchy of answers. An example of the procedure follows (Leo and Forlini 1982):

LASSITUDE: A) Weariness B) Health C) Longitude D) Fatigue
E) Vigor

The student reads and defines the stimulus word. Lassitude means weariness of body or mind. Next, the student is instructed to anticipate

the opposite of weariness. He might choose, "full of energy." Then he is to examine the possible answer choices and eliminate the incorrect answers. *Weariness* and *fatigue* are obviously synonyms and may be eliminated. *Longitude* is a geographical term and may have been included as a "ringer." If the student has misread lassitude as latitude, then he may be confused with this as a possible answer choice. Of the remaining answers, *health* and *vigor*, *vigor* is the more correct choice because it means full of energy, the initial anticipated definition.

The Analogy Question

Learning-disabled students may have difficulty with the logical relationships required by verbal analogies (Wiig and Semel 1975; de Hirsch 1984). Dyslexic students tend to be literal, and it is not easy for them to transfer meaning from one area to another. It is no wonder that of all of the items on the College Boards, the verbal analogy question seems to place the unsophisticated test participant at the greatest disadvantage. He might know the meaning of the words included in these questions, for they are the simplest in terms of vocabulary; however, if he doesn't understand that an analogy is the relationship of similar words, he will be uncertain as to how to proceed with this task. The SAT analogies are expressed in abbreviated form. Converting each analogy into sentence form will help in clarifying the relationship expressed. Most beneficial is an understanding of common analogy relationships. Several examples of analogy relationships are: 1) Synonym; 2) Antonym; 3) Part Of; 4) Type Of; 5) Many to One; 6) Part to Part; 7) Elevation in Rank, Status, or Condition; 8) Comes Before; 9) Becomes; 10) Larger Version Of; 11) Smaller Version Of; 12) More Than; 13) Less Than; 14) Purpose Of; 15) Goal Of.

Strategy

Instruct the student to read the pair and to determine the relationship between the two words. For example, if the key pair is *gargantuan: minute*, the relationship is between opposites. The student then translates this relationship into sentence form, for example, "gargantuan is an extreme opposite of minute." The student needs to remember that both words refer to size. Next he should consider all of the answer choices and discard those which he determines are incorrect.

Answers:

A) Hot: Cold

Hot is the opposite of cold, both words are adjectives, although the two words do not represent extremes in degree and do not refer to size. This pair *might* be the correct answer choice and should not be eliminated as yet.

B) Obtuse: Dull

Obtuse means the same as dull. This choice is clearly incorrect, since it is a synonym and not an antonym and should be quickly eliminated.

C) Light: Cumbersome

Light is the opposite of cumbersome. Light suggests a smaller size, therefore, it is an incorrect answer since it does not follow the same sequence as that in the key pair which was large and then small. This answer should also be eliminated.

D) Big: Small

Big is the opposite of small. Both words are adjectives and both refer to size, although they are not extremes in size. This pair follows the same sequence as that in the key pair. This is a better answer choice than A, and A may now be eliminated.

E) Corpulence: Scrawniness

Corpulent is an extreme opposite of scrawniness. Both words are nouns. They refer to size. The first one refers to the larger size and the second to the smaller size. The sequence is the same as found in the key pair. This is the correct answer (Scheller 1982).

Sentence Completion Items

Dyslexic adolescents usually have an organizational problem which can adversely affect their reading comprehension. They have difficulty sequencing, discerning the difference between major and minor points, differentiating the topic from the supporting details, and foreseeing outcomes and conclusions. An appropriate structure must be provided to encourage purposeful reading (Greenwood, Morris, and Morgan 1983). The sentence completion items in the verbal SAT subsection are considered to be mini reading comprehension questions. They attempt to measure the student's ability to read accurately and to evaluate his skill in manipulating verbal concepts. In addition, this subsection tests the extent of the student's vocabulary as well as his ability to recognize logical consistency among elements in a sentence. To succeed in answering this type of question, the student must be able to grasp the main idea of the sentence, recognize its logical organization, its clarity, and its good style. These subsections usually consist of five or ten questions having one or two missing words. Sentences having one omission are followed by five lettered words from which the student selects the one word which best completes that part of the sentence. Sentences having two omissions are followed by five lettered pairs of words. From these given answer choices, a student must select one pair of words which, when inserted in the blank spaces in the sentence, will make its meaning complete.

Strategy

Often sentence completion items will give a clue as to the missing word. I advise students to note key words, such as: *although, even though, in spite of, despite, contrary to, and nevertheless*. Clauses preceding or following such words and phrases can negate, contradict, dispute, or invalidate the idea expressed. Dependent clauses beginning with *because, similar to, and such,* will find their ideas reaffirmed, verified, and strengthened in the subsequent clause. In questions having two omissions, the student is instructed to determine which of the first words in the given answer pair best fits the first blank in the sentence. By so doing, he is able to eliminate some of the answer choices quickly. Having done this, he then considers the second word among the remaining choices to determine which best fits the second blank of the sentence. In some cases, if he is unable to determine which of the first words in the given answer pair best fits the first blank in the sentence, he can arrive at the correct answer by determining which of the second words best fits the second blank in the sentence. It is important continually to advise students to anticipate their answer choices. Even though a word they anticipated is not included as an answer choice, there may be a choice with a similar meaning. Anticipating words allows the student to clarify the idea conveyed by the sentence. I remind students to reread the sentence when a correct answer is determined, filling in the chosen answer to see if the sentence then makes sense.

An example from an SAT: (ETS 1980) "Even though this book has some _____ pages, even though it rarely breaks into eloquence or _____, the story it tells is nevertheless a deeply moving one."

- A) insipid .. drivel
- B) prosaic .. profundity
- C) memorable .. credibility
- D) tedious .. superficiality
- E) insightful .. enlightenment

The student will note the key phrase *even though*, and realize that the key words indicate a probable contradiction in the final phrase. The words *memorable* and *insightful* are complimentary and are not to be considered opposites of deeply moving. Answer choices C and E may be eliminated. The second word should be selected from answers A, B, or D. In the second phrase, the word *or* indicates that the missing word is probably similar in nature to eloquence. *Drivel* and *credibility* are not synonymous of eloquence. *Profundity* seems to fit better with eloquence, *Prosaic* which means commonplace or dull, can certainly be considered the opposite of *deeply moving*. By rereading the sentence with these answer choices, a student will logically conclude that B is the correct answer choice.

Reading Comprehension Passages

The reading comprehension section of any given SAT consists of five or six passages distributed among the two thirty-minute verbal sections. Passages may vary in subject matter from fiction to science-fiction and in length from 250 to 500 words. Each passage is followed by two to five questions. In this section, the student is tested on his ability to extract details that are explicitly stated in the passage. On another level, he is expected to draw inferences or conclusions about facts that are not directly related. To do this, the student must be able to follow the author's theme and purpose and evaluate the literary devices in reasoning by which the theme is executed. Consequently, dyslexic students, whose impaired decoding processes may render the contextual information they receive rather unusable, are being assessed in areas in which they often show their strongest deficits. They need structure provided, wherein they may discern the main idea, supporting details, and generalized conclusions. An increasing number of researchers have advised (Stanovich 1985) that "comprehension strategies such as question-asking, text structure identification, self-questioning, text scanning, imagery, and comprehension monitoring, should be explicitly taught. . . ."

Strategy

The study skills strategy I introduce to my students is called PQRST. This alphabetic mnemonic device helps the student remember that P stands for preview, Q-question, R-read, S-state, and T-test (Staton 1959). In addition to encouraging students to read actively and become involved in material, one of the most important steps of this technique is the *State* step, in which the student is required to paraphrase what he has read, indicating actual comprehension of the text. Students who perform best under structured situations find the following formula helpful in summarizing material (Schupack 1985):

WHO	DOES	WHAT	WHERE
WHAT	DID		WHEN
			WHY
			HOW

For example, the student selects a word from each group (Who Did What When). This format can partially reduce the reading comprehension deficits often displayed by poor readers.

Format

In the reading comprehension section, the questions are in no particular order, either with regard to the organization of the passage

or with regard to the question's difficulty. Inform students of the difference between explicit and inferential questions. Explicit questions are those which can be answered directly by reference to something stated by the author. To answer a question about a specific detail, the student must learn to look back in the passage to check whether his memory is accurate. An inference, however, is a conclusion about what is stated on the basis of what is not stated. Inferential questions, then, cannot be simply answered by looking for the answer in the passage. If the student has been taught how to paraphrase the material, his understanding should be enhanced and he should be more successful in answering questions of this type. The eight major types of questions which the student can expect to find in this particular subsection, include:

- 1) Main Idea or Best Title; 2) The Author's Purpose; 3) Tone and Mood; 4) Explicit Details; 5) Reasoning; 6) Literary Devices; 7) Inferences; 8) Applications

Taking the SAT, the official guide published by ETS lists five categories of selections. These may include:

- 1) Opinion/Argument; 2) Social Studies, that is, history, economics, sociology, and government; 3) General Science; 4) Humanities, including art, literature, music, philosophy, and folk lore; 5) Narrative/Fiction, including excerpts from novels, short stories, biographies, plays, and essays

One of the two verbal sections generally contains two passages, the other usually three or four. The student can expect a sample from each of the above categories, including one ethnic passage. The ethnic passage may fall under the opinion category or it may appear in a social studies or humanities section. The passage may be positive or inspirational in tone and is generally written by a person of that particular ethnic group. This passage tends to be of easy to medium difficulty, and it is one that the student should be instructed to attempt first.

Students who are scoring around or below 600 should experiment with leaving blank the most difficult passage in a section that has three or four passages. A passage that is the most difficult will vary from student to student, but in general the last passage is the most difficult. If a student, on the other hand, happens to be an authority on that subject, he should by all means do it. The fact that each verbal question is worth approximately seven points is the rationale behind this strategy. On a difficult passage, about the best a 600-scoring student can expect to do is three right and two wrong, for a raw score of 2.5 questions. This translates into 18 SAT points which would probably have

taken the student approximately six or seven minutes to complete. This time probably would be better spent on reading other passages to ensure that they are done well or that doubtful sentence completions and analogies have been reviewed. Even more important is the possibility that with unlimited time, the student may still not understand the most difficult passage and should he guess, the five incorrect answers will deduct approximately ten points from his overall score.

Instruct students that comprehension can be increased by an active, argumentative approach to reading. Not only will this stimulate the student's interest, but it should keep him awake during some of the more boring passages and improve his overall SAT verbal scores. When striving to improve his reading comprehension, the student should develop a habit of taking nothing for granted. He should constantly argue with the author, asking himself such questions as, "What do you mean by this? Can you justify this? Why is this important?" or making critical comments such as, "I don't agree," or "This is interesting." Active critical reading, using specific comprehension strategies over a long period of time should increase a student's comprehension skills.

Conclusions

Although the verbal aptitude scores are the most difficult to improve because they are generally the result of long-standing language deficits, SAT verbal skills can be augmented through a program of vocabulary development, the acquisition of test-taking strategies, and the learning of a pattern of analysis to improve skills. Constant drill and reinforcement, multimodal imagery techniques to enhance memory, and overlearning skills to the point that a student can anticipate what will be asked of him are all recommended methods to increase not only his SAT verbal scores, but his overall academic performance as well.

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