Choosing the Right Online Prep

and How to Grill Companies on What They Really Offer

Expert Advice from the PrepScholar Team

PrepScholar

The Ideal Online Prep System

In the past few years, the popularity of online test prep programs has exploded. These programs use technology to innovate beyond the classroom and tutoring techniques that have existed for centuries and help students learn more efficiently than ever before.

The **ideal online prep program is comprehensive and covers all aspects of the student's learning.** That includes:

- Guiding the student through a structured study program so they know what to work on at every point in time
- Customizing the learning to the student's strengths and weaknesses
- Using text, pictures, and video to engage the student
- Presenting comprehensive practice questions and lessons so the student doesn't have to scramble other resources together
- Motivating the student so they don't lose interest and browse Youtube or social media instead

Sounds great? It can be.

Unfortunately, most online SAT/ACT prep programs don't come close to delivering on these promises.

In this buyer's guide, **we warn you about common problems and how to avoid them.** We'll also show you how to research prep programs and what questions to ask companies to decide the right program for you.

Why Most Online Tutoring Doesn't Work

Since we started building PrepScholar, we've tried nearly all of the other online prep programs available. **Unfortunately, we've found that most of them don't live up to the promises we explained above.** Many are still glorified books, taking minimal advantage of the capabilities of technology.

One online SAT program was an exact copy of its book version, available word-for-word online — but for 10 times the cost. A well-known tutor released an "online SAT system" that simply gave instructions to students on what books to use and how to use them.

Other online prep programs offer more content and technology but still fail in major ways. One program offers video instruction, but it simply throws all its content at you in no apparent order with no direction on what to study. Another program promises customization that ultimately consists of little more than suggesting which subjects to start your studying with.

In an age where everyone wants to be digital and profit from the growing popularity of online prep, **it's unfortunate that so many companies are doing the bare minimum.** Often, once you signed up it's too late – the program doesn't even offer you a refund if you're not happy. Watch out!

We see too many students and families fall for the traps of other companies, and we wrote this guide to explain the factors that really matter in an online SAT prep program. From here on, **we'll explain each major component of an effective SAT prep program.** If the program you're looking at doesn't have these features, you're not going to get good results.

#1: Motivation

Research shows that one of the major factors in improving your SAT or ACT score is the number of hours you study. You won't improve very much if you spend just five hours studying. However, if you find a program that can motivate you to put in 20, 30, or 40 and above hours, you'll make huge strides in your score.

It's vital that the program you use is motivating and engaging, so let's go through some specific features to look for.

First, **any prep program should actively remind you of when to study.** You probably understand that the SAT/ACT is important, but even the best of us get distracted or forget to stick to our plans over time. The program should actively hold the student accountable for the work they put in.

At PrepScholar, we accomplish this through our study scheduling system. **Every week, we ask you to schedule specific study times that you'll be using PrepScholar.** We then email reminders to you and your parents so that we can keep you on track.

Second, **a successful prep program will give you feedback on how you're doing and whether you're on the right track.** If you're studying for the SAT or ACT over several weeks, you want to make sure that you're not doing anything wrong and that you're putting in enough time, before it's too late.

That's why PrepScholar sends out weekly progress reports to students and parents detailing the amount of work they've done and giving suggestions on how to improve. This way, everyone's on the same page about how much progress is being made.

"We can't thank you enough for all the attention that you have given Billy. The emails he receives from you each week are always so positive." – Eileen S., parent

Lastly, **the program should make an active effort to keep you interested in learning.** PrepScholar accomplishes this through both effective content and dedicated motivation features. You can see your specific progress every time you log into PrepScholar, and you'll see yourself getting better and better at each skill.

We also know that i**t's easy to lose attention with boring content**. At PrepScholar, you'll benefit from our engaging and interactive lessons, as well as our detailed answer explanations written by the nation's top instructors.

All these factors combine to **motivate you to study more**, ultimately resulting in a better score.

#2: Real Customization

Every student has different strengths and weaknesses, based on their education and interests. As such, **every student needs a unique study program, designed to help them overcome weaknesses and build on strengths.**

Customization is the key to studying efficiently. If you focus your test prep on what you really need to learn, **you can achieve in 40 hours what it would take someone else 120 hours** to do. That's because every minute that you spend studying gives you the best result possible, rather than wasting a lot of time.

This approach seems like common sense, but nearly every prep program fails to deliver truly personalized, efficient learning.

At PrepScholar, **we take customization seriously because it's how we learned to master the SAT.** To make your prep as efficient as possible, we've divided the SAT into over 40 skills across reading, writing, and math and the ACT into 52 skills across its four sections.

When you sign up for PrepScholar, you take a diagnostic. We then use advanced statistics and **run thousands of calculations to find your unique strengths and weaknesses**.

Next, you receive **a customized study plan focused on the specific skills you need to work on.** For every one of those skills, we place you into a level depending your ability – Core, Advanced, or Mastery. Depending on your level, you get a different lesson and a different set of practice questions for every single skill.

Every time you take one of our lessons, you're working at the skill level that's right for you — not so easy that it's wasting your time, but hard enough that it's pushing your limits of understanding. Doesn't this approach make more sense?

"I'm loving how it suits my level of SAT skills. I'm not wasting time studying things I already know." –Tatiana B., student
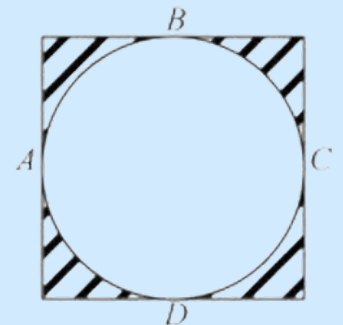
This takes a lot of work and resources for us – we've had to write custom lessons for every skill and level, and assign each one of our thousands of practice questions into a specific level. This is why so many companies fail to deliver on this promise. **But we care deeply about student results, and that's why we've taken the care to make it right.**

#3: Authentic Practice

The SAT and ACT are strange tests. **They're purposely designed to trick the average student**, with strangely worded questions that will trick you into picking the wrong answers.

Here are a few examples of how these tests can be disorienting:

- In the reading and writing section, the SAT uses technically correct English that no one would ever say in normal conversation. Students often make mistakes because the correct answer "sounds weird." Without training on realistic questions, the student doesn't learn the right concepts.

- In the math section, the ACT tests concepts that most students know, but in very convoluted ways. For example, one type of question asks you to find the area of the shaded region to the right. Most geometry classes will never teach you how to do this specifically.

These tests have a very specific style, and questions and answers are written in a very specific way. Therefore, **it's incredibly important that you practice using realistic practice questions.**

Most companies and books fail to provide realistic questions because it's hard to do it right. The question writers often haven't actually scored well on the SAT or ACT themselves, so they don't understand the subtleties of these questions. The companies get by with just a mediocre job, not a stellar one.

Here's why it's so **important to practice with only the most realistic SAT or ACT questions**:

> Imagine that you wanted to join a baseball team. Instead of practicing with baseballs, you decided to train using a wiffle ball, and you got really, really good at hitting wiffle balls. You understood how they moved and how to hit them in just the right way. Come tryout day, the pitcher throws a baseball at you, and it's a total surprise. A swing and a miss.

At PrepScholar, we take this problem seriously — so we include two types of realistic practice questions.

First, we incorporate **real practice tests published by the test makers themselves:** there are 6 official SATs containing nearly 900 questions and 9 official ACTs with close to 2,000 questions. PrepScholar integrates these tests into your study schedule at exactly the right times to take them.

Secondly, **we've hired the best SAT experts in the country to craft thousands of the most realistic SAT and ACT questions available**. These experts have scored in the top 1% of all students on the SAT and ACT (many earning full scores), graduated from top schools like Harvard and MIT, and earned multiple teaching awards. They know the tests in and out, and the questions they write are better than any of our competitiors'. Furthermore, every question has a detailed answer explanation to help you understand your mistakes.

Maintaining this level of accuracy is really expensive, which is why no other online prep program bothers to do it. But it's one of the most important parts of effective test prep.

By using PrepScholar, you'll be training with baseballs, not wiffle balls.

How PrepScholar Delivers Where Most Online Prep Fails

PrepScholar motivates you to study and gives feedback so you can be sure you're on the right track. We actually customize your prep program to your strengths and weaknesses, so that you're always working on what is most effective for you. Finally, we only use realistic or official questions so that you train on what's actually being tested.

We do all this because we actually care about improving student scores. After working with thousands of students, we understand what problems students grapple with, and we know what can get a student passed a sticking point to improve the score.

Our Students Get Results

- An **average 180 point SAT score increase** (80 points in Reading and Writing and 100 in Math)
- An **average 4 point ACT score increase** (4 to 5 points on each section)
- Top 25% of students improve 370 SAT points or more
- Up to **6.1x higher admissions rates** to Top 10 colleges compared to the national average
- 99% accepted to one of their top choice schools

You shouldn't just take our word for it. As you're deciding on the best prep program for you, **we recommend asking each company the questions on the following pages.**

Questions to Ask

Get on the phone and ask each company these questions. Our answers are given for your reference. If other companies can't answer these questions, it's a bad sign!

How does your program guide me so I know exactly what to work on at every time?
PrepScholar creates a study program for you and assigns you lessons and quizzes every week. All you have to do is log in and put in time – you never have to worry about what to study and what resources to use.

Do you customize each student's study program? How specifically does your customization work? How will my study program differ from everyone else's?
When you start using PrepScholar, you take a diagnostic so that we understand your strengths and weaknesses. We then create a custom study schedule for you, which means we give you specific lessons at specific levels in a specific sequence. No two students ever have the exact same program.

How does your program adapt to my progress over time?
Every week, we rerun thousands of calculations to understand how your skills have changed. You'll get assigned different lessons at different levels to adjust to you as you improve.

How are your practice problems customized to me?
We believe you need practice questions that are not too easy or too hard, but just right for your ability. This means questions that you should be able to do at your skill level but still push you to improve. Our program assign these practice questions automatically based on your adapting skill level.

How do you motivate me to study? Tell me specific features.
PrepScholar does this in three ways. We help you schedule SAT prep into your weekly schedule, and we remind you when to study. We send feedback reports to you and your parents so that everyone understands your rate of progress and how much effort you're putting in. Finally, we make our lessons and questions engaging so that you don't get bored while studying.

Do you help me schedule SAT prep? How specifically?
At the beginning of each week, PrepScholar asks you to fill in your study schedule. We prompt you to schedule specific times and days, instead of vague promises of "5 hours this week." We then send reminders about these times.

How do you ensure I'm studying and hold me accountable if I'm not?
Our precise tracking technology only counts time when you're actually working on PrepScholar. If you login at PrepScholar, visit Facebook for an hour, and log out, we don't count that as any time spent toward studying. Only when engaging with PrepScholar and learning do we give you credit for your time. At the end of each week, we email the time you've spent to you and your parents.

How can I figure out whether I'm on track all the way to my test date? How do I know if I'm falling behind?
We give you detailed analysis of your skill levels so that you can see how your ability is changing over time. We assign you practice tests strategically throughout your study program so that we can see how your SAT score improves over time. Our instructor also checks into every single student three weeks before the test to give custom feedback on what they can improve.

Do you use real practice tests and questions in your program? If not, why not?

PrepScholar absolutely does. We believe that realistic practice tests are the best way to get used to the length and format of the exam, and to understand your current SAT score. We assign you these practice tests throughout your study program so that you work on them when it's most efficient for you.

If you use questions that are not official, what are the credentials of the people writing them?

At PrepScholar, we've hired the best experts in the country to craft thousands of the most realistic SAT and ACT questions available. They have scored in the top 1% of all students on the SAT/ACT (many earning full scores), graduated from top schools like Harvard and MIT, and earned teaching awards. They know the tests in and out, and the questions they write are better than anything else out there (besides official practice tests).

How do I learn from my mistakes with your program?

Every single one of our thousands of questions has a detailed answer explanation that shows you how to find the right answer, and why the wrong answers are wrong. This is very important because real SAT/ACT questions have tricks that trap students into picking the wrong answers.

Do you have a refund guarantee? How specifically does it work? Do I get my money back? What are the requirements?

PrepScholar has a full money-back 160+/4+ point guarantee.You simply take an official SAT/ACT before signing up and complete the PrepScholar program before your next test. If you do this and your score doesn't improve by 160/4 points, you get your money back, no questions asked. Other companies don't give you your money back and only let you use the program for more time, so watch out!

Now What?

All of this info is a lot to take in. **Hopefully you've significantly changed how you think about online test prep**, learning the importance of motivation and doing the right types of questions in the right way.

We've seen these **three key factors help thousands of students over the past decade**, even as the SAT and ACT themselves have changed.

If the approach we talk about in this guide resonates with you, we hope you'll give PrepScholar a try! **We truly believe it's the best SAT and ACT prep program out there**, and you can start a five-day free trial today.

If you have more questions, please call us at +1 (866) 811-5546, where one of our Academic Advisers will walk you through the best options for you and your family. We'd love to hear from you!

Finally, if you found this guide helpful, **please share it with any other people who might benefit.**

– The PrepScholar Team