

SAT goes digital for SA students

South African students taking the SAT this year will be part of the first cohort to complete the tests digitally. The shift from written to digital tests comes into effect in March 2023, alongside other key changes, including significantly shorter wait time for results, and the use of an adaptive question model. For local high school students looking to study in the United States, taking note of these changes is essential as they prepare for a new testing format that they have not been exposed to before.



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“The SAT is a standardised tests that acts as a student’s benchmark against other applicants. International students, like South Africans, can benefit from taking them to increase their chance of admission, as they are a well-recognised scoring system for many US universities – and a common prerequisite to entry,” says Rebecca Pretorius, country manager at Crimson Education, a global mentorship company that helps students with the complex application process to top universities abroad.

Concerns taken into consideration

While digital testing opens up a number of possibilities, it does not mean that students will be able to complete their SAT at home. The tests will still be conducted at designated testing centres across the country, where they can be monitored by examiners. Those sitting their SAT will have the option to either use a supplied device, or to bring their own. Having all students sit the test in one venue also decreases any potential issues.

“Technical issues are likely a big concern for local students, with load shedding stages often shifting quickly, and without advance notice. The digital SAT has catered for this, by including a fail-safe that saves data in case of technical problems. This means students can take the tests, with the peace of mind that their progress won’t be lost if load shedding hits,” says Pretorius.



SAT format changes

Along with the shift from written to digital, there are a number of other changes to the SAT format. The most notable is that the test will only be two hours long, instead of the standard three hours, and it will be adaptive. This means that certain questions will be based on each student's answers in previous sections. While the content will not be changing, the questions will be quite different to previous SATs.

"There will be four sections – two reading and writing sections, and two maths sections. The second section of each topic will be based off of the previous answers each student gave. Not only will this make the results more precise, but it will also mean students receive their answers in a matter of days, instead of waiting weeks," says Pretorius.

With the changes coming into effect in March, it is fundamental that students remember how important preparation is. "Strong academics is the most important component of successful admission. The SAT showcases a student's problem-solving abilities, and are unlike tests that South African students have experienced before. Unique test-taking strategies, and preferably working with a tutor, are needed if local students want to get a top score on the SAT," says Pretorius.

The registration deadline for the next sitting of the SAT is the 7 April 2023, with the test taking place on the 8 May. Students looking to prepare can download Crimson's [free Mini SAT Practice Test](#), which includes sample questions, answers, and explanations. The practice test helps students get a better understanding of what they'll encounter on the SAT and how best to strategise for each section.

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