

Is the SAT Becoming More Difficult?

In the last year or so I noticed that it seemed more and more difficult for my students to break the 2100 threshold on the SAT. Sure, some students did it, but students in the past whom I would believed could have easily done so, were getting stuck at 2080 or so. So I asked myself: Is it harder to get a really good score now than five years ago?

To answer this question, I pulled out the score sheet for the very first version of this New SAT, given March 2005. I looked at the percentage correct needed to achieve scores from 500-800 in each section. I compared these percentages to the score sheet for May 2010. And guess what? The test is getting more difficult.

In 2005, to achieve a 2100 on the SAT, a student needed to obtain approximately 88% of the points on the test. In 2010, that same percentage correct would have only achieved a 2060.

Just for fun, I pulled out the May 2000 test. Because the SAT in 2000 did not include the Writing section, I used the Writing Subject test to calculate the score, which was later incorporated into the new exam. I asked myself: What would someone scoring the percentages correct to achieve a 700 in each section today have received ten years ago on the test? The results are even more dramatic. Using the same percentage correct as needed on the May 2010 test, a student taking the May 2000 exam would have received a 2240! What a difference!

So what does it mean? As more and more students prepare for the SAT, the College Board has no choice but to curve its scale upward to make the test more competitive by limiting the number of high scores. At some point this trend will max out and perhaps we are getting close to that point. But these numbers just prove what I had already suspected: students must do even better to achieve similar scores to students who took the exam just a few years earlier.

So over the next year, I will be working on new strategies and adjusting my program to help my students be even more accurate on the SAT. With that said, I will also be pointing more students to the ACT exam. In the last year or so, I have seen several students who got “stuck” at 2060 on the SAT do

much better on the ACT. This is not the case for everyone, but often enough so that students with high score goals should consider the ACT a viable option to the SAT.