

# “Secrets” to Improving Your SAT Reading Score

If you’ve been looking for the “secret” to improving your SAT verbal score, look no further. Instead, pick up a book, and start reading, and begin to develop a discipline of reading regularly. Even more entertaining is increasing your vocabulary by memorizing a list of “high frequency words” that can easily be obtained in any one of the SAT prep books.

I have noticed over the years of tutoring and teaching SAT to Asian American students in particular that often times, their verbal skills aren’t as refined as they should be, at their level in high school. This might be due to many different reasons, but I would attribute one to the fact that in most cases, they speak another language at home, and English is not the language that is encouraged (often rather subtly) at home growing up. The level of vocabulary that they use at home often demonstrates the limitations in their language skills, no matter how “fluent” the student might seem.

The “secret” to improving verbal scores, then, is really no secret at all. The Reading section of SAT is essentially a vocabulary test, and I cannot emphasize enough how crucial it is for the students to familiarize themselves with new words. Often times, if you know the word, you will be able to answer correctly, or at least have a good chance at an educated guess. Although there are times when you can figure out what the word might mean in context, it is imperative that the student studies the vocabulary list, and not only remember the definition, but understand the usage.

Another way to improve in the verbal section of SAT is to start reading books that are beyond what is asked for on the required reading list from school. The students will naturally pick up words that they didn’t know as they read, or at least begin to have a feel for the word. This is a way in which they can increase their vocabulary without consciously memorizing them, and also to develop comprehension skills. Developing a habit of reading regularly might take time and can definitely benefit by having parent support. I highly encourage parents to start early in helping the student develop a good habit of reading.

There are, however, tactics that the students can learn by going to an SAT prep school. They will learn different types of reading methods in order to comprehend the passage quickly and be able to answer the questions correctly. Also, they will learn to be aware of different questions types, which will help them keep in mind what to look for while they’re reading the passage, and to anticipate the types of questions that they will be asked.

Although it is important that the student familiarizes himself with the types of questions that will be asked on the test, in the long run, and as a preparation for college, I would recommend that the parents take some time to start early in developing in their child a lifestyle of reading for fun, and not merely for academics. By the time they get to high school, they will have the skills to excel in the verbal section of SAT—skills that can be further improved by learning additional tactics specific to the test.