

With Regard to SAT and ACT, If It Sounds Logical, It Probably Isn't

By Mick Rosenblum

Recently, I heard tell of someone who has been advising parents to have their students take the SAT “early and often.” This certainly sounds logical, doesn't it? After all how many times have we been told that “the early bird gets the worm” and “if at first you don't succeed, try, try again.” A few high schools have even begun to espouse this philosophy by advising their eleventh graders to take the SAT and ACT in October of the eleventh grade year! The truth of the matter is that, without proper preparation, a student has a relatively low probability of improving, significantly, on subsequent tests. In fact, he is likely to simply give up in frustration, but logical-sounding advice coming from “knowledgeable people” can be difficult for parents to disregard.

Another tempting tidbit of pseudo-logic is the notion that a prep course should focus on a student's weakest SAT sections and ignore sections with higher scores. This protocol seems so compellingly intuitive, that many parents have convinced themselves that it is the only logical approach. Any truly experienced SAT expert (and there seem to be few of those around these days) knows, however, that a student's high-scoring sections are easier to improve upon than the lower-scoring sections, and if he or she focuses on the low scores only, the other sections' scores will tend to decline, thus decreasing the overall total. If, therefore, you come across an SAT or ACT program that is willing to sell you whatever you request without giving you any advice or guidance, run for the hills.

Yet another interesting example of logic run amuck (and utterly horrible advice) is the notion that a student should take an SAT or ACT without any prior evaluation or preparation in order to obtain a “baseline score.” If a student does so, however, he or she is likely to have a very low score on the official record. Unfortunately, many universities, including those within the University of California System (UCs), may require all of the SAT and/or ACT scores rather than merely the best score, so a low baseline score” is both harmful and unnecessary.

These are just three examples of literally dozens of “illogically-logical” ruses. Nevertheless, unsuspecting parents and students fall for them with alarming frequency. Fortunately, you can avoid the pitfalls by reminding yourself that, what sounds logical, with regard to college entrance exams, is very often illogical, and those who routinely and willingly offer such advice are not likely to be SAT and ACT experts. With the right approach and guidance, however, your student will readily outperform the thousands of sorely misguided test takers. While you can't change the world, you can certainly make it work to your advantage. Give me a call and I will guide you in the right direction.