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Tutorials and Exercises to Help Students Prepare for the SAT

By **BOB TEDESCHI**

Teenagers have a hard time paying attention to anything that's not flashed across a smartphone screen. Yet somehow, parents still expect results when they plop an SAT study book in front of their children.

Note to parents: Meet your children halfway.

Apps that help teenagers study for the SAT (or, for those not living on either coast, the ACT) are improving, as traditional test-prep businesses like Princeton Review and Kaplan refine their mobile software to compete with start-ups.

Several to consider on this front include Princeton Review's SAT Score Quest for [iPad](#) (free) and SAT Vocab Challenge for [iPhone](#) (\$5), Kaplan SAT Flashcubes (free) and [SAT Connect](#) (\$10 for [Apple](#)). For math, [Adapster](#) (\$10 on [Apple](#)) is designed nicely.

[Android](#) users, as usual, have fewer choices, since the best-known test-prep companies haven't yet built apps for these devices. But [Flash of Genius: SAT Vocab](#) (\$1 Android, free on [Apple](#)) has earned good marks from users, as has ACT/SAT Math Booster (Free, [Android](#)).

For those looking to sample the wares, the category's best entry point is [Kaplan's SAT Flashcubes](#), which are tailored to the verbal part of the SAT. Presumably, this could also help ACT students. It's easy to use, and the app's interactive features make it a lot more fun to study than a static book.

Flashcubes will quiz users on hundreds of vocabulary words, using interactive 3-D cubes. The front presents the word, and if you flip the cube, it shows the definition. Other sides of the cube show synonyms, or a sentence that uses the word.

The app tracks the student's performance, so users can watch their progress over time, and it stores a list of incorrect responses so users can test themselves on those words only if they wish.

[SAT Vocab Challenge](#) offers a gamelike format, with four games in each round — covering antonyms, synonyms, connotation and definitions — and 20 words per game. The fastest answers gain and lose the most points.

Some of the app's most puzzling moments do not come from the tests. I tried one round of all four categories (thankfully, I aced them). When I clicked to the game stats page, to view my average response time, the page had no data to offer about the quizzes. When I returned to the main page, it told me I hadn't yet mastered a single word.

Vocab Challenge comes in two volumes, with each covering 250 words.

Princeton Review's [SAT Score Quest](#) for iPad is much less fun, but more helpful. It offers abbreviated practice tests for each of the SAT's three elements — math, writing and critical reading.

The tests help users diagnose possible areas of weakness, but they also offer instruction. Each question includes a tutorial on the logic behind the correct answer, and a strategy for eliminating incorrect responses.

SAT Connect also includes review materials as well as quizzes and diagnostic tests, and offers explanations of more than 800 questions. But SAT Connect boasts some elements that other apps lack, like a much longer list of vocabulary words (4,000), and the ability to compare a user's test scores against those of others who use the app.

Users who complete the five sample tests in the app can buy two additional tests for \$2 each.

SAT Connect has earned good reviews from users even at its initial price of \$25. According to a company spokesman, Andrew Fisher, the current \$10 price will remain in place at least until the end of the month.

Adapster, which is exclusively for math, is among the few highly rated apps in this category for both Apple and Android.

As the name implies, the software adapts to the user's needs over time. Users can take a diagnostic test to help Adapster tailor future tests to the user's needs, or skip that step and the app will change every new test to account for the student's performance on the previous one.

ACT/SAT Math Booster is another interesting one for Android users who bring a [Texas Instruments](#) TI-83 or TI-84 calculator into the test. The calculators can be programmed to

include shortcuts for complex equations like the quadratic formula, and Math Booster offers step-by-step instructions for doing so.

The app is from the Advantage Point Test Group, an SAT prep company. A company spokeswoman, Devorah Goldblatt, said the programs are “completely within the boundaries of both ACT and SAT” guidelines, and a section on the Web site of the [College Board](#), which administers the tests, supports her assertion.

For Android users who are looking for vocabulary help, Flash of Genius is probably their best bet. It’s not as good as the other vocabulary apps on Apple, because it relies on you to tell the software that you know a word’s definition. Users who overestimate their mastery of a particular word will suffer later as a result.

As a free app on iTunes, in other words, it’s not worth your time to download. But for \$1 on Android, it may be as good as you can get, until the industry leaders work their way over to the other side of the street.

Quick Calls

Jazz fans will appreciate [An Evening With Dave Grusin](#) (\$10 on iPad), which includes hours of video and more than 300 pages of content about the landmark 2009 performance of the jazz artist Dave Grusin with the Henry Mancini Institute Orchestra in Miami. ... The [Apple version of Kayak](#) (free), for travelers, recently had a big upgrade. It now allows users to book hotels from within the app, rather than being shuttled off to a hotelier’s mobile Web site. ... [Google Docs](#) has a new, dedicated Android app. Users can view, create, edit and upload files.