

Increase Your SAT I Critical Reading Score

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You don't have to be a gifted writer or prolific reader to ace the Critical Reading section of standardized tests. However, you do have to prepare. Here are three things you can do now to raise your score:

Study etymology, the origins of words.

By studying etymology, you can learn the historical roots of words. Often these roots can be used to figure out the meaning of the words that you don't know. In fact, by understanding how these root words combine you can often figure out the meaning of hundreds of other words.

If all this root talk is confusing you, take a look at the following example. By studying etymology, you would learn that "bio" means life and "log" means the study of. Hence, "biology" is the study of life. Now you may have already known this, but with etymology you could also figure out (or at least take a good guess at) the meanings of such words as "biosphere," "biorhythm," "toxicology," "microbiology," "symbiosis," "sociology," "astrology," and "ethnology." By studying a few roots you can decipher a tremendous number of other words. A great etymology-based book to try is Word Power Made Easy.

Study vocabulary as often as you brush your teeth. (Which we hope is at least three times a day!)

The secret to success for Critical Reading is vocabulary, pure and simple. Even though they may not test vocabulary directly, it is essential to scoring well on the reading comprehension, sentence completion, critical reading and writing tests.

Since brushing your teeth is theoretically part of your daily routine, add to this routine the study of vocabulary. It may sound difficult to do, but it's really not as bad as you may think. For example, you can carry around a deck of flash cards on which you write words and their meanings that you didn't know. Then while you are waiting for the bus or during the commercials of your favorite TV show you can whip them out and knock off a few.

Get in the habit of reading a weekly news magazine.

Not only will you stay up to date on current events (essential for the college interview) but you will also find many words you don't fully understand. Write these down on your flash cards and practice them.

If you spend just an hour each day doing a few of these exercises you will significantly improve your Critical Reading score. But you must start early. It takes time to learn new words so the sooner you begin the more you'll know by test time.