Introduction

My name is Shaan Patel and I am the founder of Prep Expert. Our mission is to help students achieve their academic goals.

I grew up in Las Vegas, Nevada, but no I didn’t live in a casino. Actually, I grew up in my parent’s budget motel far from the glamor of the strip. I went to urban public schools in the worst school district in the nation with a 40% dropout rate. And I was just an average student who loved fast food, playing sports, surfing the web, and hanging out with friends. I didn’t have a clue about standardized tests.

When I went to take my first practice SAT, I only scored slightly above average – 1760 (on the 2400 scale). This was devastating for me since I wanted to apply to highly competitive combined BS/MD programs that offer high school students direct acceptance into medical school (the average SAT score for these programs was 2200+).

So I locked myself in the library and began studying for the most famous standardized exam of all time. After hundreds of hours and dozens of practice exams, I discovered many simple strategies that helped raise my SAT score 640 points to a perfect 2400. Of the 15 million students who took the 2400 version of the SAT, approximately 3,000 achieved a perfect score – that’s just .02%. But I’m sure many of the 3,000 were just geniuses. And that was the difference. I wasn’t a natural genius. I had learned how to ace the test – going from average to perfect.
My perfect SAT score changed my life. I was admitted into prestigious universities such as Brown, Northwestern, UC Berkeley, and Johns Hopkins. I received over 20 private scholarships that totaled a quarter-million dollars from companies like Coca-Cola, Toyota, and McDonald’s. And I received some great awards including valedictorian, USA Today All-USA High School Academic Team, National Merit Finalist, and Presidential Scholar where I got to meet the President of the United States!

I ended up choosing to attend the University of Southern California because of the Baccalaureate/MD program, a full tuition scholarship, and proximity to home. After completing three years of medical school at USC, I took a two-year leave of absence to pursue an MBA at Yale. As of the writing of this book, I am currently an MD/MBA student at USC and Yale.

I never thought of starting a test prep company to be honest...it just kind of happened. After I achieved a perfect SAT score in high school, I always wanted to write an SAT prep book.

In college, I created a book proposal to pitch to literary agents. Unfortunately, 100 literary agents turned my book proposal down. They said that I didn’t have a platform to write such a book and that the SAT prep market was too competitive. When I finally secured a literary agent to pitch my book to publishers, I continued to receive rejections – with one publisher even stating that she “didn’t find Shaan’s writing or persona particularly engaging – he’s not a great writer, no matter what his score is.”

As you can imagine, I didn’t have high hopes at this point that I would ever be
a published author. So I had two options. Plan A was to continue to hope for a book deal. Plan B was to throw in the towel. But when life gives you Plan A or Plan B, make Plan C. I decided to leverage the material I had written to teach SAT courses in Las Vegas the summer before I started medical school in Los Angeles.

I worked tirelessly to launch 2400 Expert (now called Prep Expert). Although 2400 Expert was only supposed to be a one-time summer course, the average score improvement of 376 points in the pilot class created a big demand for future courses. Because I was going to medical school, I trained instructors to teach my material and continue running courses in Las Vegas.

After McGraw-Hill, a company that initially rejected my book proposal, saw what I was building with 2400 Expert – they ended up offering me a book deal after all. SAT 2400 in Just 7 Steps eventually became a #1 Amazon Bestseller. Ironically, what I originally had wanted didn’t become a reality until I decided to take a completely different path!

Fast-forward four years after I started 2400 Expert, and we’ve come a long way. Prep Expert remains the only SAT prep company developed by a student who went from an average to perfect SAT score in high school. We have helped over 20,000 students prep for the SAT. The average score improvement in our in-person SAT courses is 376 points.
Here are some testimonials from students at Prep Expert:

Today, the scores came out, and I found out I got a perfect score. I really have to thank you for helping people like me. I never dreamed that I would actually get 2400.

*Shirley Y.*

Nonetheless, we were all floored when his scores came in last month, and he scored a perfect 2400. This SAT preparation book was the only one he used.

*Carolyn B.*

Hey Shaan! I know we don’t know each other personally, but I just want you to know that your book got me a 2400. I was around a 2200 in June of 2013, and on October, I got the 2400 solely because of WYPAD and the writing strategies (I was already at an 800 with the math). Thanks so much; you were a life saver. I’ll be attending Harvard this fall, and I’m sure your book helped me get there!

*Abhinav S.*

The essay template was amazing, and I specifically loved the critical reading “line specific” method, which helped me improve from a 680 Critical Reading score to a 790.

*John S.*
My SAT score has improved by over 500 points from the first week of class to over 2000+!

*Alexander T.*

I have now achieved confidence and proficiency on the SAT that I never had. My family agrees that it was the best $999 we have ever spent.

*Madison S.*

I was recently admitted to Stanford University... raising my SAT score through your program made a world of a difference.

*Julia E.*

However, I wrote this book not to focus on SAT prep itself, but to help parents navigate the college admissions process. When I was in high school, I learned many useful tips related to college admissions, test prep, and scholarships. This book will share everything with you!
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Secret 1

How to Raise a Successful High School Student

I had a tremendous amount of success in high school. I was valedictorian, homecoming king, and a perfect score SAT student. My GPA and SAT score helped me gain admission to some prestigious universities such as Brown, Berkeley, Northwestern, and Johns Hopkins. I also won 20 merit-based college scholarships amounting to $250,000 from companies like Coca-Cola, Toyota, and McDonald's. In addition, I was named a National Merit Scholar, USA Today All-USA High School Academic Team Honorable Mention, and a Presidential Scholar (where I got to meet the President of the United States).

However, I never consider myself a genius. I grew up in my parent’s budget motel, attended urban public schools in the worst school district in the nation with a 40% dropout rate, and was clueless about standardized tests. But through focused preparation, I was able to raise my SAT score from average to perfect — which changed my life!

Parents often ask me how their son or daughter can achieve similar levels of success in high school. Well, it starts with developing a single trait. Let’s take a quick quiz.

Which trait is the best predictor of success?
The answer: self-control. Self-control is the most universal and accurate predictor of success. If you want your child to be successful, he or she needs to be able to manage emotions, delay gratification, and work hard. All of this requires significant self-control.

However, possessing self-control is harder than ever today. Technology has added numerous distractions to the daily life of a teenager: e-mail, text messaging, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, YouTube, NetFlix, etc. Having the self-control to avoid all of these enticing platforms is no easy task.

If you want your child to have massive success in high school, he or she must turn off the internet, silence the phone, and work in a distraction-free environment. As I write this book, my MacBook is disconnected from the internet, my iPhone is in my bag, and my Apple Watch is set to “Do Not Disturb.”

I have continually practiced self-control to avoid distractions. For example, when I wanted to author an SAT prep book, I spent over 1000 hours writing. I often skipped fun social activities in order to write. The book ended up being picked up by the world’s largest education publisher (McGraw-Hill) and a #1 bestseller on Amazon for SAT Prep. I could not have achieved that had I not practiced self-control.
But don’t just take it from me. This chapter was inspired by a guest lecture on personal change given by social psychologist Dr. Victoria Brescoll at the Yale School of Management during my MBA Leadership course. Professor Brescoll pointed to the famous Stanford marshmallow experiment as proof that self-control is crucial to success.

In the 1972 experiment, researchers would place a 4-6 year-old child in a room with just a marshmallow. The children were told that they could eat the one marshmallow now, but if they waited 15 minutes, they would be rewarded with two marshmallows. This experiment was conducted on over 600 children. Only a third of the children were able to exercise enough self-control to not eat the marshmallow immediately. Years later, these children were found to be more successful based on a variety of life outcomes:

- Scoring 210 points higher on average on the SAT
- Earning higher salaries
- Being more popular with peers and teachers
- Having lower BMIs & better overall health
- Possessing fewer drug and alcohol problems

Many other studies have continuously found that self-control is a massive predictor of achievement. What’s the secret to raising a successful high school student? Help your child practice self-control.
What is the secret to getting a perfect SAT score? I cannot count the number of times parents have asked me that question. Well there actually is a secret. But it is so simple that hardly seems like a secret. I am fairly certain that the 3,310 other people that have gotten a perfect 2400 on the SAT have also done this. So here is my one piece of advice your child needs to excel at the SAT:

**Practice with College Board SAT questions only.**

Every high-scoring SAT student I have ever known has followed this prep advice. Many parents go out and buy “10 SAT Practice Tests by Company X” for their child to prepare for the SAT. But if your child is practicing with SAT questions produced by Princeton Review, Kaplan, Barron’s, or any company other than the College Board, then he or she is preparing for the SAT incorrectly.

The College Board is the company that creates the SAT. Therefore, the questions that the College Board produces are most similar to the ones you will encounter on test day. In fact, many of the questions that the College Board releases have actually been used on past SAT exams.

Producing accurate test questions is tough. The College Board spends millions of dollars writing questions, testing them on students, analyzing the results, and making sure that the questions are truly “standardized.”
Other companies simply do not have the budget or resources to create questions that are nearly as accurate.

Where can your child find College Board SAT questions? Here is a complete list of resources:

This includes 10 official SAT exams — that’s 1700 official SAT questions! Note: Only use the book for the practice questions and skip the “strategies” at the beginning of the book — they give you generic advice that is not very useful.

**The Official SAT Online Course (MSRP: $69.95)**
This includes an additional 10 official SAT exams — that’s another 1700 official SAT questions!

**The Official SAT Practice Test (Free)**
The College Board releases a free test every year for download.

**The Official SAT Question of the Day (Free)**
The College Board releases a free test question everyday. Be sure to subscribe to get The Official SAT Question of the Day e-mailed to you for daily practice!

**Additional Official SAT Practice Questions (Free)**
The College Board has an additional 170 official SAT practice questions available on their site.

In addition, 2400 Expert purchases College Board questions for our students to practice with in our SAT prep courses. This same idea applies to students taking the ACT. If your child is taking the ACT, make sure he or she practice with questions produced by ACT, Inc. only.
Secret 3

How to Get Into The Ivy League

Do you want your child to attend an Ivy League university? Here’s a little known secret: impress the college’s regional admissions officer to increase your chances.

Colleges want students that want them. Colleges don’t want to offer admission to a student who is not going to attend their institution. Therefore, qualified students who apply to universities without expressing any interest are often rejected.

One of the best ways to express interest is for your child to get to know the college’s regional admissions officer. This is a full-time staff member at the admissions office who is assigned a certain geographic region, such as California, Nevada, and Arizona. This person will not only visit that geographic region during the Fall, but will also be the first to read applications from his or her assigned area.

If your child has met the regional admissions officer for your geographic area, then he or she may advocate to move your child’s application forward in the admissions process! So you should help your child build a relationship with them. For example, your child may want to e-mail them, meet them when they visit your area, and even setup an interview on campus when you visit the university.
From my own experience, I really wanted to go to Brown University. As a senior in high school, I signed up for the lunch talk when the regional admissions officer visited our school. I was the only student who signed up. Therefore, I was able to have a one-on-one chat with the regional admissions officer from Brown University about my interests and application to Brown. I also stayed in-touch with her via e-mail throughout the admissions process. Fast-forward a few months, and I was admitted to Brown University! While my grades and test scores certainly qualified for admission, I cannot help but believe that my personal relationship with the regional admissions officer helped me gain acceptance to this Ivy League university.

To give you another example, there was a couple at my high school that was older than me. They both developed good relationships with the regional admissions officer for Yale, and they both got in. Once again, I do believe that they were both qualified. However, I also think that having an advocate in the admissions office can help your chances of acceptance tremendously!

Have your child start by e-mailing the admissions office of your desired university and finding out who the regional admissions officer for your geographic area is. Then, have your child send this person an e-mail and find out if they will be visiting your region anytime soon. If your child does have the chance to meet them in person, make sure he or she makes a good first impression! It can be the difference between acceptance and rejection.
Secret 4

How to Find Easy Scholarships to Win

When I was in high school, I was received over half a million dollars in scholarship offers. Because some of these scholarship offers were school-specific, I ended up actually receiving approximately $250,000 to go to college. These scholarships still covered the cost of tuition, housing, textbooks, food, and all other college-related expenses during my undergraduate career.

Many people attribute my scholarship success to my perfect SAT score. While having a stellar SAT score certainly helped, there was one simple secret that helped me secure a debt-free college experience: local scholarships are easier to win.

The fewer applicants there are to a particular scholarship, the greater your chances are of winning that scholarship. And local scholarships undoubtedly have fewer applicants than national scholarships. For example, if your child applies to a scholarship that is only open to students in your state, then the competition has already been reduced by at least 50 times.

Of the 100 scholarships I applied to during my senior year of high school, I only won 1 national scholarship that was open to everyone. However, I won over 20 local scholarships, which were only open to students in my community, city, or state.
This means that applying for those national scholarships is actually a waste of time. In order to find local scholarships, your child will have to do some legwork.

(1) Visit The Counselor’s Office
Your son or daughter’s counselor will likely be a resource for local community scholarships. Companies often announce a scholarship they are offering by notifying high school counselors. But sometimes, that message doesn’t get relayed to students. So make sure you or your child pay a visit to your college counselor.

(2) Research Online
Your child can find many local scholarships by doing quick searches online. For example, if your child goes to high school in Burbank, California, search for terms such as “California Scholarships”, “Burbank Scholarships,” “Los Angeles Scholarships,” and “Southern California Scholarships”. You and your child will quickly find scholarships you’ve both never heard of before. And that’s good! The more obscure the scholarship, the fewer applicants it is likely to have.

(3) Ask Around
When we live in the age of laptops, iPhones, and iPads, we sometimes forget one of the best ways to obtain information: word of mouth. Often times, parents of older high school students know of scholarships that are specific to your community and school. Ask around in your community if parents know of any scholarships offered by local companies.
(4) Apply For National-Local Scholarships

What is a “national-local” scholarship? Well, I just made up the term. But I define it as a “national scholarship that allocates a certain number of scholarships to each state or community.” For example, when I was in high school, I applied for an award called the AXA Achievement Scholarship. Although it was a national scholarship and in association with U.S. News and World Report (so everyone knew about it), I still believed I had a good shot at winning. Why? Because even though the scholarship was open to everyone in the nation, AXA gave a $10,000 scholarship to 1 student in every state. Essentially, this “national” scholarship was turned into a “national-local” scholarship. I figured I had a good shot at winning because of this. And I was right!

(5) Find Local Scholarship Foundations

Look for foundations in your community that are dedicated to disbursing scholarships. When I attended school in Las Vegas, there was an organization called the “Clark County Public Education Foundation (CCPEF)”. The sole purpose of this organization was to give out scholarships to students. There are lots of individuals, organizations, and companies that want to give money to the youth. However, these donors don’t always know how to start their own scholarship program. So instead, they hire organizations like CCPEF to create, manage, and disburse scholarships on their behalf. CCPEF had a database of hundreds of scholarships that were only open to Las Vegas students. See if there is a similar organization in your community.

Once your child has identified which local scholarships he or she will be applying for, it’s time to really focus on their applications. Put the deadlines for each scholarship on a family calendar so that you both don’t forget. And make sure your son or daughter works weeks in advance to put together the best possible
application (especially the essay). By putting together stellar applications for many local scholarships, your child is almost guaranteed to win!
How to Win $100,000+ in Scholarships

Parents with students who are high school juniors (or younger) — listen up! Did you know that if your son or daughter scores well on the PSAT, he or she can receive $100,000+ in scholarships?!

The PSAT is also the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test. National Merit is not only an impressive award to have on your child’s college application, but also a scholarship. Your child can receive a $2,500 scholarship directly from the National Merit Scholarship Corporation. More importantly, many universities offer half-tuition or full-tuition scholarships exclusively to National Merit Scholars. Here is a list of just a few universities:

Full Tuition Scholarships

1. University of Arizona - $120,000 + iPad + $1,500 Award
2. Drexel University - $180,000
3. University of Central Florida - $140,000 + Laptop
4. Baylor University - $140,000
5. UNLV - $80,000 + Study Abroad Expenses
Half Tuition Scholarships

1. University of Southern California - $100,000
2. Boston University - $80,000
3. Wesleyan College - $80,000
4. University of Cincinnati - $80,000 + $1,500 Award
5. UNR - $70,000

The above list is just a small sample of the dozens and dozens of colleges that offer scholarships to National Merit Finalists! Your child can essentially receive $100,000 - $200,000 just for scoring high on one test! But how high must your child score on the PSAT? It depends on the state in which you live. More academically competitive states have higher National Merit cutoff scores. Because the PSAT is changing in 2015, no one can say for sure what the cutoffs for each state will be. But based on last year’s cutoff’s scores, I have estimated the approximate cutoff scores for juniors taking the PSAT this year.

Class of 2017 New PSAT National Merit Cutoff Scores (Approximate)

- Alabama — 137
- Alaska — 139
- Arizona — 141
- Arkansas — 136
- California — 147
• Colorado — 141
• Connecticut — 145
• Delaware — 142
• District of Columbia — 148
• Florida — 139
• Georgia — 142
• Hawaii — 140
• Idaho — 137
• Illinois — 142
• Indiana — 140
• Iowa — 137
• Kansas — 141
• Kentucky — 139
• Louisiana — 142
• Maine — 140
• Maryland — 146
• Massachusetts — 147
• Michigan — 139
• Minnesota — 142
• Mississippi — 137
• Missouri — 138
• Montana — 136
• Nebraska — 138
• Nevada — 137
• New Hampshire — 140
• New Jersey — 148
• New Mexico — 139
• New York — 144
• North Carolina — 140
• North Dakota — 133
• Ohio — 141
• Oklahoma — 136
• Oregon — 143
• Pennsylvania — 143
• Rhode Island — 140
• South Carolina — 138
• South Dakota — 134
• Tennessee — 140
• Texas — 144
• Utah — 137
• Vermont — 141
• Virginia — 145
• Washington — 145
• West Virginia — 133
• Wisconsin — 138
• Wyoming — 135

However, unlike the SAT and ACT (which your child can take as many times as he or she likes) the PSAT can only be taken once: October of junior year. If your child took the PSAT as a sophomore, the score does not count towards qualifying for National Merit. He or she must take it again as a junior.

It’s not necessary to study for the PSAT separately from the SAT. The PSAT is actually just an easier version of the SAT: no essay, easier math, and half the length. I recommend that students simply study for the SAT. If your child studies for the SAT prior to October of his or her junior year, your student will be over-prepared for the PSAT. Make sure your child is in a good position to score well on the PSAT so that he or she can qualify for National Merit!
Secret 6

How to Stay Focused When Studying

A student in one of our SAT classes at 2400 Expert recently asked me, “how do you stay focused?” This question caught me off guard since I often instruct my students to study for hours at a time. I sometimes assume that students can attend a 3-hour SAT class, complete a 4-hour SAT exam, or study for multiple hours at a time without issue. However, I should not be so naive. Back when I was in high school, I also sometimes had trouble focusing during studying. But after studying for the SAT, PSAT, SAT Subject Exams, AP Exams, MCAT, GMAT, USMLE Step 1, and USMLE Step 2 CK, I have developed some effective study habits that help me stay focused. Hopefully they will help your child too.

(1) Turn Off The Tech
These days, it’s so easy to be distracted by technology: e-mail, text messaging, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat. When I study for a standardized exam, I turn off the internet, silence my cell phone, and study from actual books. I am amazed by how much more work I am able to accomplish without all of the technological distractions.

(2) Start With The Hardest
“Studying” can entail many different tasks. Start with the hardest task first. For example, when I was studying for the SAT, I would always begin with memorizing vocabulary words. Memorizing vocabulary words was the most taxing on my brain. Therefore, I would start with this task first since my mind is
freshest at the beginning of a studying session.

(3) Time Tasks
Put a time limit on the tasks your child needs to complete. For example, when I was studying for the USMLE Step 1, I knew that reading 20 pages of a medical study guide took me about 1 hour. Therefore, if I started reading at noon, I would try to have 20 pages read by 1PM. Timing your child’s tasks will keep your child on track.

(4) Take Breaks
One of the best way to stay focused is to take breaks. Your child’s mind cannot concentrate for more than an hour or two at a time. Therefore, your child should build-in time to his or her study schedule to take breaks. For example, I typically schedule out 4-hour study blocks but after 1-hour of studying, I reward myself by allowing checking text messages, e-mail, Facebook, etc. After two hours of studying, I usually take a lunch or snack break. I then try to do a difficult task after eating since my brain has newfound energy from the food.

(5) Introduce Study Variation
Reading for four hours straight is very difficult. Instead, break up each hour of studying with different tasks. For example, have your child try the following SAT study schedule:

- Hour 1 - Memorize Vocabulary Words
- 15-Minute Break
- Hour 2 - Read New SAT Strategies
- 30-Minute Lunch/Snack Break
• Hour 3 - Review Old SAT Strategies & Questions
• 15-Minute Break
• Hour 4 - Practice SAT Questions

Notice how your child never does the same thing for more than an hour. This variation makes four hours of studying much more bearable.

(6) Do Not Multitask
There are many studies that prove that multitasking does not work. I have come to same conclusion from my own experience. If you want your child to be productive, have him or her focus on one task at a time. For example, do not let your child watch TV and study at the same time.
Secret 7

How to Stay Focused During the SAT or ACT

The reason it is often so hard for many students to focus during a standardized examination is that it is boring. Most people are not interested in the standardized test. Speaking from experience, I always found SAT Reading passages especially boring. Because I was never interested in SAT Reading passages, my SAT Reading score always suffered. This was always the section of the SAT that I scored the lowest in.

Think about it. Why does your child understand an article he or she read on Facebook much better than he or she understands an SAT Reading passage? Your child is actually interested in the Facebook article!

The only way to increase your child’s comprehension and focus during a standardized exam is to become interested and engaged. No matter how boring the reading passage, grammatical rule, or math problem, your child must act like he or she is interested.

Teach your child to fake interest. For example, on an SAT Reading passage, I will often question the claims of the passage, comment on the author’s claims, and anticipate what comes next. Even though I am not actually interested in the article, questioning, commenting, and anticipating helps me become engaged with the passage. When I am engaged with the passage, I am able to stay focused. And when I stay focused, my score increases.
If you want to help your child stay focused during a standardized exam, help him or her become interested in the exam — no matter how boring it actually is!
Secret 8

How to Conquer Test Day Stress

In order to conquer test day stress, have your child focus on the present moment.

Eckhart Tolle’s The Power of Now states that the key to happiness is to focus on the present moment. In addition, one of the key messages of Dale Carnegie’s How to Stop Worrying and Start Living is to “live in day-tight compartments.” Essentially, both of these books assert that people become stressed because they regret the past or worry about the future, rather than focusing on the present.

This could not be more true for standardized tests. The primary reason that many students get test anxiety is due to worry about the future. Worry about how the test might turn out causes many students a significant amount of stress.

In order to combat this worry, have your child focus on today, not tomorrow. For example, during the week leading up to the test, try to help your child avoid thinking too much about the upcoming test. Instead, focus on the practice questions and studying that can be done today.

The night before the test, try to help your child focus on the current day rather than tomorrow. Focusing on the next day often leads to a lack of sleep the night before the exam. I am speaking from experience. I’ve often had trouble
sleeping and used to take melatonin to help me sleep. However, I now realize that many of my sleeping troubles were due to anxiety about what I would have to accomplish the next day (i.e. a standardized exam). Now, I never have a sleepless night. I have practiced focusing on the present moment. I don’t let my mind wander off to have thoughts about tomorrow. There is only today.

Help your child become conscious of his or her mind. If your child’s thoughts are becoming about tomorrow, try to help them refocus on today. When your child begins to focus on the current moment, he or she will be much happier and perform much better on test day.
How to Get An Awesome Letter of Recommendation

Recommendation letters are an essential part of the college and scholarship application process. Choosing the right teachers to write your child’s recommendation letters is crucial. Your son or daughter must select a teacher who he or she has developed a good relationship with. The teacher should know your child well so that he (or she) can write about specific examples of his (or her) interactions with your child. Your son or daughter should also select a teacher who can write well. Having a great relationship with a teacher who can’t write well or who uses the same cookie-cutter template for every student will not help your child.

When I was in high school, I was lucky enough to establish a great rapport with my English teacher, Mrs. McCoy. She wrote me an excellent recommendation letter that helped me get into great universities and win a quarter million dollars in scholarships. Below is an exact copy of her recommendation letter.

VIEW LETTER ON NEXT PAGE
To Whom It May Concern:

I have known Shaan Patel since he joined National Honor Society in his sophomore year (I was the NHS advisor until this year), and he is also a student this year in my English Language and Composition AP class. Nothing could give me more pleasure than writing a recommendation for this extraordinary young man. I cannot think of a student who is more deserving of a scholarship than Shaan.

I have been teaching for almost 13 years, both at the University of Nevada Las Vegas and at the secondary level in high school, and I can honestly say that I have never come across a student with Shaan’s broad-based abilities. It is usual to find a student with particular talents in math or English, but it is quite unusual to find one who is equally at home with both the hard sciences and the world of liberal arts. He is also a person of strong ethics, and I have never known him to thoughtlessly violate his own standards of behavior, which are exceedingly high. The single time that he thought he might be doing something that could be considered wrong, he came to me and talked it over until he felt he had arrived at the best solution to his dilemma.

I rarely give scores of 100% on essays, but I have already done it twice this year with Shaan. Not only does he have a thorough understanding of English grammar and the construction of an effective argument, but he has the ability to use vivid description and the graceful turn of phrase as well. It is obvious to me that his reading has been both wide and deep since the references that pop up in his essays are so varied. I consider him to be among the top two or three students of my teaching career.

Shaan’s chief intellectual characteristics are honesty and curiosity. He also is quite open and ready to be persuaded from a previously held opinion if he believes the evidence is sufficiently compelling. A good example is the week my AP class was reading George Orwell’s “Politics and the English Language” and Russell Baker’s “American Fat” — both having to do with pompous, excessively Latinized, and jargon-filled writing. At first, Shaan attacked Orwell’s ideas because more elevated language is often useful and desirable when one is looking for precision or aiming one’s remarks at a particular audience. As usual, most of the rest of the class was swept up in Shaan’s rhetorical wake; however, when we were debating the merits of the second essay, Shaan waited until near the end of the discussion and then turned the tables on his classmates by deciding that he had changed his mind about this issue. His argument was so subtle and delicately qualified that it effectively sucked all the air out of the discussion and left the class wondering what had just happened to them.

Shaan will occasionally stay after class to debate a point further with me or bring up something from the previous week he has been mulling over. Ideas are important to him, and he delights in teasing out fine shadings or melding disparate positions in unique ways. I was fascinated a couple weeks ago when he shared some of his ideas about treating patients, using both “Western” science and “Eastern” or...
alternative methods. He is not a person who believes that the solutions to wellness are simple — because humans themselves are not simple beings. Our discussion ranged over surgical and pharmacological methods as well as social, religious, and philosophical approaches to health. I am convinced that he will not only be a great doctor, but he will surely write about what he does in such a way that medicine will be changed by his practice and ideas. A mind like his will never be content with the status quo. He will continue to pursue knowledge and its useful applications—as well as its philosophical implications—for the rest of his life.

Leadership comes naturally to Shaan. Other students defer to him because of his intellect, but his kindness and perception turns followers into friends. His interests are mainly in the area of helping people, and he usually rises to the top of any group because of the intensity of his interest. When others have given up or lost interest, he will still be working unwilling to quit until the job is done. I personally saw this in Honor Society, when—as busy as he was with other activities—he continued to put in the required number of service hours and more. This year, in my AP English class, he is the same way with assignments and projects. He will drive himself and his group until all the requirements are met to his satisfaction.

I have seen Shaan Patel grow from a rather shy sophomore, who quietly went about the business of earning his hours of service in the National Honor Society, to a confident young man who ran for office and won (he is the current vice president of NHS). I have also observed as he as devoted himself to serving the homeless at Las Vegas soup kitchens, planting trees and shrubs at a new regional park, playing with children at a downtown daycare facility, visiting shut-ins at a nursing home, and volunteering many hours at a local hospital. This year, he has become immersed in his work with a group of young people who are working with the Southern Nevada Water Authority to develop a plan for water conservation in Las Vegas. As he has with his service work with Honor Society, Shaan sticks with his interests, undeterred by the ups and downs of daily life. If he decides that something is worthwhile, he stays with it.

Unlike the stereotypical “brain” who gets a perfect score on the SAT (which he did this year), Shaan is sociable, likable, and respected by his peers and the adults who work with him. I have found him to be a person of remarkable maturity for his years, and I have personally watched him handle difficult personal situations with seriousness and calm.

He was not raised in a “cushioned” middle class suburb; instead, he has lived over the family motel in the urban core of Las Vegas. His perspective has been shaped not only by a strong family and ethnic identity, but by the sometimes raw life he has observed on the streets around him. He has developed an understanding of the world that includes the disadvantaged as well as the affluent. He not only possesses a sharp intellect, but he has developed a compassionate heart and graceful way with people that is utterly sincere. His resume is replete with academic accomplishments, extracurricular activities, and
service to his communities; however, it is his thoughtful approach to life and his personal integrity that distinguish him from most of the students of my acquaintance. He is absolutely exceptional.

If I can be of further help to you as you make your decision, please do not hesitate to call me or write to me at the number and address below.

Sincerely,

Cynthia L. McCoy
Secret 10

How to Get Into Med/Law/Pharm/Dental/Business School From High School

Many students aspire to become physicians. But as you may know, the path is difficult. In the United States, it often takes 11-15 years after high school: 4 years of college, 4 years of medical school, and 3-7 years of residency in your chosen specialty.

One of the most difficult parts of the process is simply gaining admission into medical school after college. Unfortunately, some students who want to become physicians often end up not pursuing their dream because they are unable to gain acceptance into medical school.

Medical school admission is extremely competitive — acceptance rates are often less than 5%. Medical schools often look for students with a premed background, a high GPA, a high MCAT score, basic science research experience, clinical experience, and international volunteering experience. Even with all of that, students often need to take 1 to 2 years off after college in order to do more research before they can gain admission into medical school. In other words, students need to work extremely hard during undergrad in order to get into medical school.

But what if I told you there is a way to bypass this process? Approximately 50 universities across the nation have combined medical programs — also known as BS/MD or BA/MD programs. High school students who are accepted into these programs are guaranteed a spot in medical school.
Essentially, these programs let you skip the rat race of medical school admissions.

However, BS/MD programs are very competitive as well. Because there are only a few seats in each program, acceptance rates to these programs are often less than 5%. High school students who gain admission into these programs often have high GPAs, competitive SAT scores, hospital volunteer experience, research experience, and community service. Students who are able to get into one of these programs often have a much better undergraduate experience than their fellow premed classmates. I recommend that all high school students who are fairly certain they would like to pursue a career in medicine consider these programs.

Some well-known BS/MD programs include combined programs at Northwestern, Brown, and Boston University.
7 Questions Parents Must Ask Every Test Prep Company

Test prep is a competitive industry because profit-margins are high and barriers to entry are low. Just about anyone can call themselves a “test prep tutor.” Sometimes it’s hard to tell the difference between high-quality and low-quality test prep. Here are seven questions parents must ask any test prep company before deciding who to take a class with.

(1) Who created your test prep materials?
Creating test preparation materials is not easy. You must have mastered the test yourself in order to teach others how to do well on an exam. If the test prep company you are considering did not create their own test prep strategies, then a big red flag should go up in your mind.

(2) How many hours of test preparation do you offer?
Score improvements are directly related to the number of hours a student dedicates studying for an exam. However, I have seen some test prep companies offer “classes” that have as little as 10 hours of class time. A dozen hours is typically not going to get your child the score improvements he or she desires. You should also calculate the price per hour to objectively compare the value offered. For example, a company might be half the total price but offer only one-quarter the number of hours.

(3) Do you have a money-back guarantee?
Most test prep companies do not offer a money-back guarantee. Instead, their
guarantees will say that students can take additional classes. Make sure to read the fine print of “guarantees” that many test prep companies offer since many will not return your money if your child doesn’t improve his or her score.

(4) Who are your instructors?
Many test prep companies hire instructors that have not scored all that high on the actual exam. In addition, some test prep companies will hire college students who have no previous teaching experience. Be sure you know who is teaching your child before you sign up for a class!

(5) What are your results?
The best indicator of a good test prep company is how well their previous students have done. Find out what the company’s average score improvement is, what colleges their students have been admitted to, and any scholarships their students have won.

(6) Do you proctor full-length examinations?
In order to improve your child’s test score, taking full-length proctored examinations is absolutely essential. However, most test prep companies do not proctor exams for their students. If the company you choose doesn’t offer this service, then your student will not have the chance to take the exam in a simulated test-day environment.

(7) What kinds of questions do you use?
Using questions from the test creator is the best way to improve your score. No other company has the statistics and data to replicate accurate standardized questions. For SAT prep, this means using questions produced by the College Board. For ACT prep, this means using questions produced by ACT Inc.
If the test prep company you select has students practice exclusively with questions that are not produced by the test creator, then you are in big trouble.