

# **The Little Known Secrets to SAT and ACT Success**

*By Michele LoBosco & Jacqueline J. LoBosco, Ph.D.*

## Meet the Authors



**Michele LoBosco** received her bachelor's degree in psychology and completed graduate coursework at Columbia University. She has over a decade of experience in the independent education industry, and has lectured and authored extensively on the topic of education and academic success. She is co-founder of **Academics Plus Tutoring Center**, a premier tutoring and training company that specializes in personal development and academic enrichment programs for individuals of all ages. Academics Plus employs a staff of learning

specialists and educators that assists students of all grade levels and abilities achieve academic and personal success by providing a wide range of coaching services based on their one-of-a-kind success model.



**Jacqueline J. LoBosco, Ph.D.** received her bachelor's degree in psychology from Boston University, her doctoral degree in neuropsychology from The Graduate Center: CUNY, and completed clinical training at Yale University's School of Medicine. Though a clinician by training, she is an educator by choice, as well as the co-founder and Director of **Academics Plus**. At Academics Plus she puts her training in neuropsychology to practical use by offering academic coaching and remediation

to students with and without learning disabilities, as well as helping supervise a staff of tutors committed to working with students with a wide range of learning issues. As an alumna of Hunter College High School, Jacqui is familiar with the competitive NYC high school curriculum and helps students navigate through their challenging course loads to achieve academic and personal success. She helps students increase their own self-knowledge, identify and eliminate negative "self-talk," explore their own obstacles to success, and decrease stress, worry and fear by incorporating breathing, focusing, and de-stressing techniques into her work.

### Books by these authors

*How to Ace the SAT\* Without Losing Your Cool*  
*The Academics Plus SAT Success System: Academic Workbook*

*How to Ace the SAT\* Without Losing Your Cool*  
*The Academics Plus SAT Success System: Personal Workbook*



## The Little Known Secrets to SAT and ACT Success

Preparing for standardized tests can be a daunting task, and many high school students begin their SAT or ACT preparation process with the belief that it will be a long and arduous journey. Oftentimes, students begin this journey by enrolling in a SAT or ACT preparation program, and most students undertake this first step thinking that if they can just master the math, English, writing, and in the case of the ACT, science concepts, they will ace the test. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Success on these exams is a measure of a multitude of factors, including concept knowledge, preparation, stress and time management, as well as test-taking ability. In addition to these factors, family dynamics, self-esteem, motivation, and anxiety can play a large role in how well a student performs.

The good news is that there are a number of steps that can be taken that will make this journey a little less arduous, a little more rewarding and a lot more successful. This article will offer some hints and suggestions, as well as some alternative perspectives that will help both parents and students during this potentially trying and challenging time.

### Avoid Comparisons

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It is very common for students to compare themselves to their friends and classmates. And, it is not uncommon for students to try to live up to their siblings' or parents' successes, such as the phenomenal SAT score that ensured a father's acceptance to Harvard or the ease with which an older sister sailed through the test preparation process. Comparing oneself to others can be defeating and confusing, and may undermine self-esteem and confidence. Every student begins the standardized test preparation process with his or her own set of skills and abilities, and responds to the challenges of the test in a unique way. It is much more productive for students to endeavor to make steady and constant progress with respect to their own personal starting point, and to set personal goals, and monitor their own progress at cumulative steps along the way with this starting point in mind.

### Increase Self-Knowledge

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Having a clear understanding of one's own learning styles and preferences can have a significant impact on the test preparation process. Students with comprehensive knowledge of their own skills, talents, strengths and weaknesses are in much better positions to achieve higher scores on these exams. Students can monitor and assess their own process by asking questions that help them identify the methods, strategies, and habits that work for them (e.g., *What problems give me the most trouble? Which questions make me doubt myself the most? At what times am I most productive? Is time management a problem for me?*).

At Academics Plus, we promote the exploration of various studying methods and strategies during the preparation process. For example, visual learners often benefit from making vocabulary index cards with fun

and silly pictures while auditory learners benefit from audio taped vocabulary lists and definitions. Once effective methods are discovered, they should be implemented time and time again until they become habitual. This increased self knowledge can increase the efficacy of the time spent preparing and decrease the frustration that often occurs as a result of hours and hours of less than efficient studying.

## **Set short, achievable goals**

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Setting goals is an important aspect of any endeavor and is particularly important when preparing for the SAT or ACT exam. At Academics Plus, our goal-setting process is composed of a number of steps. First, we help students identify and articulate long-term goals. We find that this intention-stating step creates purpose and momentum, and encourages their active participation in the process. Then we help them identify and explore their reasons for selecting and setting their goals by asking questions such as: *Why do you want to achieve this goal? Why is a good score important to you? Or why isn't it?* This helps students discover aspects of their learning processes and value systems that may have gone unexplored. Often this process helps students identify what makes them tick, what makes them excited, inspired, motivated, and what makes them discouraged, defeated, and dismayed. The next step is to identify a series of short-term goals designed to help students accomplish their ultimate aims. Students are then supported as they reach each of the short-term goals until the final goal has been achieved. This procedure is highly successful because it keeps the students' attention on steps that can be achieved rather than on the overarching and often overwhelming long-term goal. During this process, accomplishments can be celebrated and successes acknowledged.

## **Celebrate success**

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Acknowledgment of success is a key component of the work we do at Academics Plus. Although students succeed each and every day, they often give more attention to their setbacks or "failures" than to their daily successes. We find that it is incredibly helpful to keep bringing the students' attention to that which they have achieved. This acts to reinforce their confidence in their abilities, and helps them to internalize the belief that they are capable of succeeding. This, in turn, leads to a healthier self-image, a greater sense of independence, and the ability to creatively and constructively overcome obstacles that stand in their way.

With these four steps in mind, students can more successfully interact with standardized tests, and at the end of the process, emerge stronger, more knowledgeable, and more effective in their problem solving and critical thinking skills. When fully implemented, these steps can help students develop the self-knowledge, confidence, and motivation that allow them to achieve their goals without the stress, strain and frustration commonly experienced.

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