

The Tutor Times

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Bad Interim: Where Do We Go Now?

By: Laura Smith



So, you received a less than stellar interim report. First of all, don't panic. Interims act as a warning system: a way to let you know if you are off track before any grades are recorded permanently onto your transcript. P.J. Podesta, a middle and high school teacher at the Field School in Washington, D.C., explains that a bad interim report can indicate

that you haven't been completing assignments or doing the assignments satisfactorily. He suggests going straight to the source, the teacher, to figure out exactly where you went wrong.

Mr. Podesta added that talking to your teacher shows that you are a serious student, and he or she might be willing to reward this kind of extra effort. "If a student came to a teacher, wanting to improve, the teacher might ... agree to letting the student retake a test, or allow the student to do an additional project for extra credit."

Bad interim reports are often the result of poor organization and time management. Perhaps you are putting a lot of time in, but it isn't apparent from your work. Try a different note-taking system, like typing your assignments. Organize your subjects into appropriate folders, keeping homework, notes, and handouts separate. (Also see *The List*, our article from the last issue that discusses organization.) Getting organized will save you time later, and you can spend your extra time doing important things, like studying for tests.

Finally, bad interims are often an indicator of comprehension issues. You may need to take some one-on-one time with a tutor, your teacher, (Please see *Bad Interim* on Page 5)



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College Corner: Essays for the Common Application

By: Leah Nelson

For seniors, it is time to nail down the list of colleges and send out those applications. While your test scores, activities, and grades play an important role in whether you're admitted to your choice university, essays can make or break your application. Many of the schools you may apply to are now using the

Common Application (www.commonapp.org), allowing students to submit one application to many different schools. Remember that any school using the common application uses a holistic method in evaluating applicants; this means they want to know more about you than just test scores and grades. The essay is your chance to rise above the fray and give the Admissions committee the opportunity to see who you are.

Many schools will allow you to write about a topic of your choice, so be creative. Pick the topic that speaks most to you, but also keep in mind that this is your chance to stand out from

the crowd. Think about what makes you unique. If you have trouble coming up with a topic, ask someone who knows you well. There are likely countless applicants who admire great world leaders, so you want to think of something that is unique to you, or at least provide a unique perspective on a topic.

“Your grades and test scores will show what kind of student you are; show the person behind the grades in your essay.”

Don't think of the essay as just another paper written for school. Your grades and test scores will show what kind of student you are; show the person behind the grades in your essay. Admissions counselors are looking to see what you can add to the student body: do you have a unique experience or perspective you can share with others on campus? Most schools are looking for a well-rounded class, not just students with the best grades and the most awards. Try not to repeat information you already listed in your application; the essay should add something different about you.

(Please see *Common App*, Page 5)



The Tutor Times is a publication of Commonwealth Education, a leading provider of private one-on-one tutoring in the following areas:

- SAT/ACT Preparation
- All School Subjects
- College/High School Application Assistance
- Basic Study Skills

Tackling the SAT

By: Ryan Garton

The summer feels like it was a long time ago, and now the school year is starting to pick up steam. For you seniors and juniors, the Fall means you have to add one more thing to your to-do list: studying for the SAT (or ACT). Those three little letters strike fear in the hearts of a lot of 16- and 17-year olds, but with the right attitude and game plan, the test can be passed with flying colors.

Once the administrative details are finished, we suggest buying a book for SAT preparation that contains sample questions, answers, and explanations. One that we like and use in our SAT tutoring is *The Official SAT Study Guide* published by the College Board. Because the book is written by the administrators of the SATs, it provides students with invaluable source material for test preparation.

With the book purchased, figure out exactly how long you have until the test. Do you have two weeks? Or 2 months? This will help guide your studying. Start out by taking one of the complete practice tests in your SAT book in a simulated test environment. No TV. No radio. Go to the library or another quiet place for a few hours with a timer and complete the entire test. This test will provide a baseline that will highlight your strengths and weaknesses and help you devise a study plan.

The SAT is broken down into three types of problems, easy, medium, and difficult. The problems in each section start with the easy problems and then progress to more difficult questions by the end. Try to work methodi-

cally though the easy problems, build some confidence, and then get to work on the medium questions. The medium problems are typically the majority of questions in each section. If you feel good about those, take the remaining time to work some of the difficult questions. We suggest focusing on the easy and medium questions, as the difficult ones tend to eat up a lot of time that can be better spent on the other questions.

The scoring on the multiple choice section is as follows: 1 point for a correct answer, $\frac{1}{4}$ point deduction for a wrong answer, with no penalty for questions left blank. There is a delicate balance between educated guessing and leaving questions blank on the test. Guidance varies, with some saying you only need to eliminate one answer to make a guess. We like to suggest that you knock out two of the answers before guessing. At that point you've got a 1 in 3 chance of guessing correctly. Of course, if

(Please see SAT, Page 5)

<i>Test Dates</i>	<i>Registration Deadline</i>
December 5, 2009	October 31, 2009
January 23, 2010	December 15, 2009
March 13, 2010	February 4, 2010
May 1, 2010	March 25, 2010
June 5, 2010	April 29, 2010



You Are What you Eat!

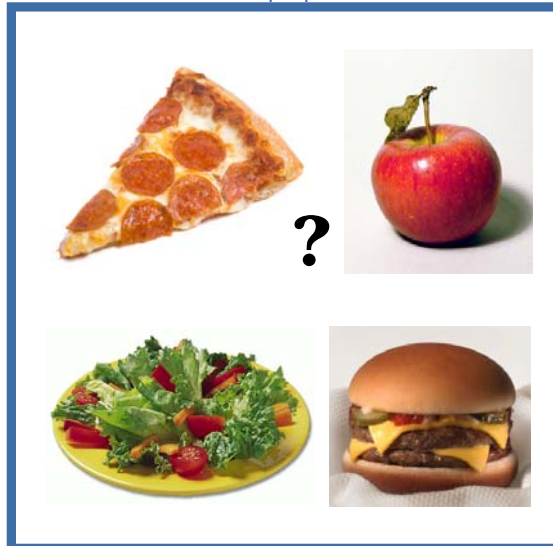
By: *Laura Smith*

If you're wondering if what you eat is related to your school performance, wonder no more. A healthy balance in your diet is essential to learning, memory, and focus.

Here is a fun fact to prove it: Your brain only accounts for 2% of your bodyweight, but 20% of your caloric intake is reserved for brain function.¹ That's why your teachers, parents, and tutors have always stressed how important it is to bring a snack to any long tests such as the SAT, or to eat breakfast before going to school in the morning. Your brain requires a lot of energy. Ever feel dazed after taking a long test, being in class all day, or working on a paper for a long period of time? It's because your brain needs fuel!

Furthermore, your choice of food plays a large role in your daily functioning. Numerous studies have linked the consumption of cruciferous vegetables (broccoli, spinach, and green lettuce) to learning and memory.² In addition, foods that are high in Omega-3 fatty acids like salmon, walnuts, and soybeans have the "good" kind of fat that enhances brain func-

tion.³ Aside from foods that are specifically geared towards brain function, it is important to get a balanced diet: the correct balance of carbohydrates, protein, and fat.



It is important to eat enough, but on the other hand, if you eat a huge, heavy meal and then try to study, you will notice a heavy fatigue set in. Before doing your homework or taking a test, eat moderately, so you don't feel like taking a nap instead of diving into your work. Some doctors and dieticians even suggest eating six small meals per day is better than

three large ones.⁴

Of course, it is nearly impossible to eat the "right" foods all the time. We're all human, and love to eat a slice of pizza, a sundae, or a cheeseburger every now and then. We are not suggesting that you avoid those foods. What we are saying is that by choosing smart foods on a consistent basis, you'll be in a much better position when you sit down to start studying for exams or learning new material.

(1) Nixon, Robin, "Brain Food How to Eat Smart," *Live Science*, January 7, 2009. <http://www.livescience.com/health/090107-brain-food.html>

(2) "Focus on a Brain Healthy Diet," *AARP.org*, Oct 7, 2009.

(3) Estroff Marano, Hara, "What is Good Brain Food?" *Psychology Today*, Oct 1, 2003, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/200310/what-is-good-brain-food>.

(4) <http://www.thehealthyeatingguide.com/6smallmealsaday.html>

Bad Interim (cont'd)

or a friend to make sure you are fully grasping all the concepts. School can be a heavy load; don't be afraid to find a support system that works for you. Fight the tendency to look at an interim in a negative light. Take it for what it is, a progress report, and use it as springboard to focus your efforts and an opportunity to turn your grade around!



Laura is an English and Humanities, French, SAT, ACT, and study skills tutor for Commonwealth Education. She earned her B.A. in English Literature from the University of Virginia.

Common App (cont'd)

Most importantly, edit your work. Several times. It's best if you have your essay written and revised several weeks prior to submitting your application. Make sure you have it reviewed by a parent, teacher, tutor, or someone else you can trust, to provide feedback on how to make your essay better. Sloppy essays and typos will reflect poorly on your application, so make sure you have someone else proofread your essay before submitting it.



Leah helps Commonwealth Education students with the college and high school application process. She graduated from William and Mary with a B.A. in Psychology and also earned a M.Ed. in Counselor Education from the University of Virginia.

SAT (cont'd)

you feel like you can't get down to three possible answers on too many questions, then start guessing on the questions where you can only eliminate one answer.

In closing, get a good night's sleep before the test, eat a good breakfast Saturday morning (and dinner Friday) and you will be fueled up and ready to go when the test begins.



Image Courtesy of Google Images



Commonwealth Education was founded by Ryan and Maria Garton to meet the tutoring needs of students in the greater Washington, D.C. area. Both have more than ten years of experience tutoring students in a wide variety of subjects.



Ryan is responsible for the day-to-day operations of Commonwealth Education, including the coordination of tutors and students. He has tutored students of all ages, from middle-school to adult literacy students. He currently also volunteers as a literacy tutor and tutor trainer for the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia.

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