**SAT Prep on the Web: A) a Game; B) Online Chat; C) All of the Above**

By KATHERINE BOEHRET, WSJ

This Saturday, high-school students around the country will sit for hours of silent testing that will determine some portion of their future: That's right, it's SAT time. For both parents and kids, the preparation for taking the standardized test is stressful and expensive, often involving hours of studying and several hundreds of dollars spent on classes, workbooks and tutors. And many kids will take these tests more than once. WSJ's Katherine Boehret reviews Grockit, a web-based test-prep program that helps students prepare for standardized tests like the SAT, ACT, GMAT, GRE or LSAT by combining lessons, group study, and solo practice with social networking among test-takers.

So this week I tried a Web-based form of test prep called Grockit that aims to make studying for the SAT, ACT, GMAT, GRE or LSAT less expensive and more enjoyable. Grockit.com offers lessons, group study and solo practice, and does a nice job of feeling fun and educational, which isn't an easy combination to pull off.

A free portion of the site includes group study with a variety of questions and a limited number of solo test questions, which are customized to each student's study needs. The $100 Premium subscription includes full access to the online platform with unlimited solo practice questions and personalized performance analytics that track a student's progress. A new offering called Grockit TV (grockit.com/tv) offers free eight-week courses if students watch them streaming live twice a week. Otherwise, a course can be downloaded for $100 during the course or $150 afterward. Instructors hailing from the Princeton Review and Kaplan, among other places, teach test preparation for the GMAT business-school admissions test and SAT.

For the sake of testing, I focused on the SAT and plunged back into the depths of reading, writing and (gulp) math to get a sense of what students see and do on Grockit.com. In a short period of time, I found myself wanting to go back to the site to get better at certain sections or to earn more Experience Points, which result in badges and unlock new levels of study, both of which can be optionally posted to outside networks like Facebook or Twitter. By default, everyone can see one another's points, which invites healthy competition; these can also be hidden if you'd rather keep them private.

I tested both the free version of Grockit.com, which includes an SAT writing diagnostic test, and the extra offerings of a $100 Premium account, including diagnostic tests for writing, reading and math to evaluate my strengths and weaknesses in taking the SAT. The free version had too many messages that constantly notified me of what I could do with a paid account and prompted me to upgrade.

**Grokit**

A look at a Grockit group study session: 1. Sample question; 2. other players; 3. Grockit messages with running score of correct answers and badges earned and those shared on Facebook; 4. instant messages from players.

Along with completing practice questions with strangers and instructors, I got a friend of mine to also use Grockit.com so we could compete together in Grockit's Speed Challenge Games. These are included in the free portion and they reward the fastest person who answers a question correctly—but also display incorrect guesses, thus narrowing the possible answers for those who don't answer first. It was more fun for me to play against someone I knew, but I can imagine kids preferring the anonymity of competing with strangers when they don't answer questions correctly.

In an introductory video, Grockit founder and chief product officer Farb Nivi describes the site by saying, "It's like having a complete multimedia textbook and workbook online, at your fingertips." But for kids (and from my experience, adults), the computer isn't an easy place to concentrate. On any given PC, especially one used by a teenager, instant-message indicators are chiming, Facebook updates and Twitter tweets are waiting to be checked, music is playing in the background and emails are flowing into inboxes. Plus, the Grockit site is just a tab away from other websites and distractions. And the site has no way of working in a distraction-free mode, like how the new Microsoft Office for Mac offers Full Screen View, which quiets any alerts or pop-up distractions.

It also isn't necessarily comfortable for students to read extensive text (like in reading questions for the SAT) on a vertical computer screen. The site will run on the iPad, which can be held on a lap for more comfortable reading, but many students don't own one of these.

Part of the way Grockit is made more fun is by purposely incorporating social networking into the experience. As people work on questions, they can instant message with one another in a right-side panel about tips for answering questions or simply for commiserating about studying. These IMs don't make indicator sounds, so they aren't too intrusive, but they can't be fully closed. I saw several chats among teens about nothing in particular, as well as some test-taking tips from instructors and other students. Grockit encourages users to "be nice" in chats because all conversations are logged; people can also