



Standardized Tests

A fact of life for high school students.

PLAN EARLY TO TAKE THE SAT OR ACT AND SUBJECT TESTS. TYPICALLY, STUDENTS DO BEST AFTER TAKING THE SAT OR ACT A COUPLE OF TIMES.

THERE ARE MANY OPTIONS FOR TEST PREPARATION, FROM BOOKS TO CLASSES, TO ONLINE PREPARATION. DO SOME RESEARCH AND FIND THE ONE THAT IS BEST FOR YOU.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Love them or hate them, standardized tests are an integral part of high school and college admissions. Throughout your high school years, you will be asked to take a variety of tests to evaluate your aptitude and understanding of various topics. Many states are aligning their high schools' curriculum with the Common Core State Standards and may require yearly assessment tests. Some states and/or school districts also require high school exit exams to prove a minimum level of knowledge before graduation. Additionally, students who take Advanced Placement courses or participate in International Baccalaureate programs will have the opportunity to take final AP or IB exams. Likewise, students who speak English as a second language may be required to prove proficiency in English with the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) or the IELTS (International English Language Test System).

What are college admissions standardized tests?

Both the SAT and ACT are college admissions tests designed to measure your reading, math, writing, and science abilities. Together with your transcript and other academic information, these tests give an indication of your readiness for college-level studies. While a majority of colleges require the SAT or ACT, there are a group of colleges that are test optional. To find these schools go to: www.fairtest.org.

SAT OR ACT?

All colleges will accept *either* the ACT or SAT for admissions purposes. It is wise to either take one of each test or a diagnostic test to determine which one reflects your strengths. It will simplify your life if you work to master just one test.

ACT Test

What is the ACT Test? ACT test results are used as one of the criteria for acceptance to a majority of colleges. The test measures academic achievement in English, Math, Reading, and Scientific Reasoning. The exam is almost three hours long (English: 45 min., Math: 60 min., Reading: 35 min., and Science: 35 min.). In addition, there is a 40-minute ACT writing test. You may sign up to take the test with or without the writing portion, but you should check with each college you plan to apply to and see if the essay is required. The base test costs \$46.00 and the ACT with writing section is \$62.50. In 2018, the ACT added a 20-minute experimental section that will not impact students' scores but will be mandatory.

When should you take the ACT Test? You can take the ACT Test anytime during high school, usually in junior and senior years. The test is given seven times yearly usually in September, October, December, February, April, June, and July. It is given at selected high schools that are listed on the website (www.act.org). You can choose to take the test at any available high school or community college venue. Sign up early to get the location you prefer.

How is the ACT Test scored? The Composite Score is 1 to 36 (average of the four section scores) on the base test. The writing score is graded 1-12, is reported separately, and does not affect your Composite Score. Test scores will be available two-eight weeks after the test.

SAT Test

What is the SAT Test? The SAT was designed to be used as a test for college admissions. The SAT has three components: Verbal – Reading and Writing; Quantitative – Math and Science; and Optional Essay. The test is 3 hours and 30 minutes long and the essay is an additional 50 minutes.

When should you take the SAT Test? Students can take the SAT anytime during high school, usually in junior and senior years. The test is given seven times yearly usually in August, October, November, December, March, May and June. It is given at selected high schools that are listed on the website (www.collegeboard.org). You can choose to take the test at any available high school or community college venue.

How is the SAT scored? The Verbal and Quantitative sections of the SAT are worth 800 possible points. The maximum score is 1600 and includes subscores for Reading, Writing, Math, and Science. Note that the math portion is broken into two sections: one that allows the use of a calculator and one that does not. The essay score has three components: Reading, Analysis, and Writing. Each score is from 2-8. Test results are made available to you within three to five weeks of the testing date.

What is the cost and where do you take the SAT Test? The cost of the test is \$64.50 with optional essay or \$47.50 without the essay. Fees may increase slightly each year. Many area high schools are testing sites — find locations online (www.collegeboard.org) or in your SAT Registration Bulletin. Sign up early to get the location of your choice.

STANDARDIZED TEST TIPS:

- During registration, you will be required to upload a headshot photo on a plain background. It must look like you when you take the test. Hats, sunglasses, and scarves are not allowed except for religious purposes.
- If you are late registering for the SAT, you can request a place on the waitlist for a specific date and location. Standby testing is not allowed on the SAT. A \$51 waitlist fee is added if you are admitted. If there isn't space, you will be refunded the \$51 fee.
- If you have questions, need to register late, get on a waitlist, change dates or location, or get scores early, call (866) 630-9305 or go to www.collegeboard.org for the SAT or call (319) 337-1270 or go to www.actstudent.org if concerning the ACT.
- Allow 40 minutes to sign up for the ACT — you will have the option to fill out a survey used to help you explore careers. Please be aware that some college admission offices will use the results of these questionnaires in their admission decision.
- Have a credit card ready to pay when you sign up. If you can't afford the registration fee, speak to your high school counselor to determine your eligibility for a fee waiver. Students are allowed to use two separate fee waivers. These must be used on the test date requested and do not cover additional fees such as late fees.

What to bring (and not to bring!) to the test

Arrive a few minutes early with two sharpened, number 2 pencils, an eraser, your SAT/ACT admissions ticket, photo I.D., and an acceptable calculator (graphing, scientific, or four-function calculators only — no laptops or QWERTY keyboards allowed). You can bring a watch — without an alarm, with no access to the internet, a drink and/or snack for break time, and extra batteries for your calculator. Don't bring your cell phone, any electronic devices, scratch paper, books, rulers, or highlighters.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

New “Environmental Context Dashboard” announced by the College Board

In an effort to help colleges make admissions decisions that include consideration of a student’s high school/community/family environment, the College Board has created an Environmental Context Dashboard for colleges to view each student’s SAT scores in context with data gathered about the student’s high school and neighborhood. As part of this process, the College Board, using data gleaned from the student’s high school information and data gathered from the student during the registration process, has begun creating an Adversity Score for each test-taking student. These scores, which are on a scale from 1-100, (1 meaning least disadvantaged), are not disclosed to the student and are provided to colleges to be used as the colleges see fit.

Accommodations for Standardized Tests

If you receive testing accommodations in high school for documented needs, you will most likely be able to receive accommodations on your standardized testing as well – including the PSAT/NMSQT, SAT, ACT, SAT Subject Tests, and AP Exams. Realize that there is a formal process to request accommodations; you cannot assume you will receive accommodations if you have a 504 or IEP at school. Typically, students work with their high school counselor to submit requests for accommodations to the SSD (Services for Students with Disabilities) at the College Board or ACT organization. Plan ahead! It can take two to three months to receive approval, and registration dates may be earlier than the published dates if you are receiving accommodations.

You will need to document your disability with a psychoeducational evaluation or a report from a doctor. The requirements will depend upon the disability and the accommodation that you are requesting. Be prepared to send copies of documentation to the testing organization with your request. Your history of receiving accommodations in school will play a role in the decision as well. Once you have been approved for an accommodation, it will not expire until a year after you graduate from high school. If the College Board approves it, then it will apply to all College Board tests – PSAT/NMSQT, SAT, SAT Subject Tests, and AP Exams. However, if you choose to focus on the ACT and are taking an AP Exam or SAT Subject Test, then you will need to get approval from both organizations.

Types of Accommodations

There are numerous disabilities that could warrant accommodations; some include blindness and visual impairment, learning disorders, and physical impairments. Accommodations commonly include Braille, large print exams, extra breaks, computer use for essays, and extended time.

When extra time is requested, be sure to specify how much extra time you are requesting and for which subject areas. If you are approved for extra time for reading or English, you will receive extra time on the entire test. If you request extra time just on math, then you will simply receive extra time on the math section of the test.

Be aware that if you receive an accommodation of extra time on your tests, you will need to stay for the entire time of the test. You cannot move ahead on a section when you complete it but must wait for the time allotted to elapse. This may be different than what you experience in school, so you will need to be prepared for a longer testing experience (more water and snacks!). The most common accommodation is 150% of the standard time, but a longer accommodation may be granted if the disability warrants it. Accommodations are also available for English language learners. If English is not your native language, you may be eligible for English language support. Check with your school counselor to see if you qualify.

**To learn more about accommodations, log onto the College Board
or ACT websites or call the SSD at the organization:**

**College Board SSD: 212-713-8333 www.collegeboard.org
ACT: 319-337-1332 www.act.org**

Pre-Tests

You might be wondering if there's a way to take a pre-test of some sort for the SAT or the ACT, and the good news is, there is! The SAT offers the PSAT/NMSQT (Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test) and the ACT offers the PreACT. While both testing organizations offer these pre-tests, there are some important distinctions and pros and cons for these tests. Here's a comparison of the two tests:

PSAT/NMSQT	PreACT
Offered Once a Year: The PSAT is offered only in October through high schools. Sophomores and Juniors may take the test. Some schools allow freshman to take it too.	Flexible Test Options: The PreACT can be given to sophomores by high schools anytime between September 1 and June 1. Not every high school participates yet, however.
2 Hours 45 Minutes: 15 minutes shorter than the official test – close enough to get some practice with endurance.	1 Hour 55 Minutes: A full hour shorter than the official ACT. Less endurance practice.
Max-Score 1520: The official test score is a max of 1600. This makes comparing the two tests a bit difficult if you are trying to predict what you might get on the actual SAT test.	Max-Score 36: The PreACT scores the same as the official ACT, allowing students to more closely predict the score they will receive.
Math, Evidence-based Reading and Writing: Exact topics covered on the official test.	Reading, Math, English, Science: Exact topics covered on the official test.
National Merit Qualifier: If a student takes the PSAT during junior year, he/she is automatically evaluated to see if he/she qualifies for the National Merit Scholarship.	Not a Scholarship Qualifier: The PreACT is solely intended to help students prepare for and predict scores on the actual ACT.
Scores: PSAT scores are sent to high schools six – eight weeks after test administration.	Scores: PreACT scores are available typically within two weeks.
No writing/essay component	No writing/essay component
Cost: The PSAT costs \$16	Cost: The PreACT costs \$12

What is NMSQT exactly?

NMSQT sounds like a word in a strange language with no vowels! But, in fact, it's actually an acronym for the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test. The **NMSQT** is the same test as the PSAT. If a student takes the PSAT in junior year of high school, he will automatically be considered for the prestigious National Merit Scholarship.

The National Merit Scholarship Program calculates a selection index for test-taking students and awards the top scorers either commendation or semi-finalist status. Commended students receive congratulations for this achievement and can apply to other scholarships from colleges and businesses. For students that earn semi-finalist status, the process continues with additional requirements from the students. Some of these students will reach finalist status and eventually the winners will be selected from this pool. Students who achieve any of these statuses are likely to have many merit aid opportunities as colleges actively seek students with this accolade.

Additional Tests

Subject Tests: SAT Subject tests are offered through the College Board. There are 20, hour-long, subject-specific tests offered in five subject areas: math, science, foreign languages, English, and history. Some schools (or specific majors) require or highly recommend two or three of these tests and may use the test scores to place students in the appropriate introductory course. For colleges that do not require these tests, the scores can be used by students to demonstrate strength in an area of interest.

AP Exams: Advanced Placement courses are specific courses offered at the high school level that offer students a more challenging, college-level experience. Students who take these courses are given the opportunity at the end of the course to take the corresponding AP exam. Depending on the final score, students can earn college credit, test out of introductory courses, and demonstrate a high level of competency in a subject area. These exams are administered through the high school but are managed by the College Board.

IB Exams: The International Baccalaureate program is a program designed to challenge students with a specific pattern of course work all taught at a more advanced, challenging pace. Depending on the program offered at the high school, students are given the opportunity to take a career-related IB exam to show proficiency in a career-related topic, or if the program is structured as such, take an IB Diploma exam for an overall IB score.

TOEFL and/or IELTS: The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Testing Service (IELTS) are both tests to show proficiency in the English language for students for whom English is not their first language. Colleges may require scores from either of these tests for foreign language speakers. It is wise to check with each college you are interested in to see what its specific requirements are.

SCORE REPORTING

Every college has a standardized test score reporting policy. The first thing to understand is whether a college offers Score Choice. You should check with the admissions office of each school to verify this policy. You will also see this clearly when you are ordering your score report from either the SAT or ACT. If Score Choice is allowed, there are two options that may be offered:

1. Reporting your highest overall test sitting.
2. Reporting your “super-score.” Super scoring is the ability to report the highest score from each individual section to build a new “super-score.” Super scoring is not allowed by all schools offering Score Choice. Check carefully.

For colleges that do not offer Score Choice, you are required to send all test scores from all sittings.

During registration and up to a nine days after the test, you will be offered the option to designate up to four, free score reports to be sent to colleges of your choice. You should use this option with caution, as colleges will receive the score report before you do and may also see the other colleges you’ve listed — including the order you listed each college. Fee waivers are available for some students. Check each testing organization to see if you qualify.

There is a cost to sending score reports.

SAT: Score reports can be ordered from <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/register/fees> for \$12 per school. Any or all your scores can be sent in a single report.

ACT: Score reports can be ordered from <https://services.actstudent.org> for \$13 per school.

Although your test scores do not always have to arrive by the college application deadline, you will need to plan for any applications you submit under the Early Action and Early Decision options. These application options require that test scores are received prior to the application deadline.

Note: Students do not need to send official AP score reports until after they have committed to a college.

READ THE
PROMPT AND
THEN TAKE A
MOMENT TO
ORGANIZE
YOUR
THOUGHTS
BEFORE YOU
START
WRITING.

YOU'LL SAVE
TIME IF YOU
HAVE A PLAN.

Understanding the standardized test essays

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

In addition to evaluating your test-taking skills, the SAT and ACT test how well you can write without outside editing. Both the SAT and the ACT have a written essay portion on the exam. (Registration for the ACT and SAT essays is optional, although many colleges do require the essay.) Regardless of the test you choose, here are a few tips that will help you through this portion of the test:

- Colleges understand that you have limited time (40 minutes on the ACT, and 50 minutes on the SAT) to read the prompt, formulate your position and supporting examples, and write the essay; they will treat it as a good first draft. This means colleges don't expect the essay to be completely perfect.
- Essay graders have limited time to read your work and are looking for specific details: position, supporting examples, organization, vocabulary, sentence structure, grammar, and word usage. Take time to acquaint yourself with the scoring rubrics listed below so come test day, you'll remember what you need to accomplish.
- Don't draw negative attention. Yes, you want to use powerful vocabulary, but if you can't remember how to spell a word, it is far wiser to change it to a simple word that won't be noticed than to try to wow the reader with your incorrectly spelled, impressive vocabulary word.

SCORING:

ACT Essay The essay is scored by two readers — each giving a score from 1 – 6. As long as the scores are within one point of each other, they are added together for a score from 2 – 12 (12 being the highest score you can receive). If the scores are off by more than one point, a third reader will weigh in on your essay. Remember that the essay is only one section on the entire test. Keep calm and you will be able to finish it in the required time limit without any problem.

SAT Essay The essay is scored by two readers — each giving a score from 1 – 4 on three different factors. As long as the scores are within one point of each other, they are added together for a score from 2 – 8 (8 being the highest score you can receive). If the scores are off by more than one point, a third reader will weigh in on your essay. You will receive three numbers representing scores on Reading, Analysis, and Writing (e.g., 5/4/5).

SCORING RUBRICS

Each of the testing companies provide a scoring rubric for the essay portion of the test. These rubrics will give you a good idea of what the readers are looking for. Use the links below to find the rubrics:

SAT

[HTTPS://COLLEGEREADINESS.COLLEGEBOARD.ORG/SAT/SCORES/ESSAY](https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/scores/essay)

ACT

[HTTPS://WWW.ACT.ORG/CONTENT/ACT/EN/PRODUCTS-AND-SERVICES/THE-ACT/SCORES/WRITING-TEST-SCORES.HTML](https://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/scores/writing-test-scores.html)