

BASICS OF THE ACT, PSAT AND SAT: A GUIDE FOR ADVISORS

ACT Test Information

Most colleges require students to take a standardized exam as part of the admissions process; either the ACT or the SAT. While there are many similarities, as a curriculum-based test, the ACT test is more straightforward than the SAT, and you can take the ACT several times and choose which score to submit.

What's on the ACT

The ACT has 4 tests: English, Reading, Math and Science, as well as, an optional 30 minute essay. Some schools may require the essay, so be sure to ask before you take the test. [More about what's on the ACT.](#)

The weight placed on ACT scores varies from school to school. Other important factors that schools consider in their admissions decisions are your high school GPA, academic transcript, letters of recommendation, interviews, and personal essays.

For more specific information on the importance of ACT scores at the schools to which you are applying, contact the admissions offices at those schools.

When to take The ACT

The ACT test is offered nationally every year in October, December, February, April, and June. It is also given in September in select cities. [More about ACT test dates.](#)

Students have traditionally taken the ACT in the spring of their junior year and, if necessary, again in the fall of their senior year. However, more and more students are choosing to take their first ACT earlier, such as during the fall of their junior year. This gives them more flexibility to retake the ACT test one or more times, or to take the SAT or SAT Subject Tests.

PSAT and SAT Test Information

About the Tests

The PSAT is mainly a practice test. It's very similar to the SAT, but without the essay and some algebra. However, a high score on the PSAT is the only way to qualify for a National Merit Scholarship, and a good score can also qualify you for some scholarship money. So don't blow it off.

In a nutshell, the SAT is offered 7 times a year, lasts for 3 hours and 45 minutes, and has [3 sections](#) (math, reading, writing). It costs about \$43 to take if a student doesn't qualify for a fee waiver.

A good SAT score is whatever you need to be competitive in the eyes of your target schools. The average on each section of the test is around a 500.

We recommend taking the PSAT in October of your junior year, as well as an SAT in the winter or spring. While some students take the PSAT sophomore year, you can decide to get a preview by attending one of our free practice tests instead....less stress and faster feedback! You'll also have more time to take any SAT Subject Tests you may need (depending on where you want to apply, you may need one or more).

What's on the SAT

There are 3 SAT sections. Each section is scored on a 200 to 800 point scale, making the "perfect" score 2400. The national average score per section is around 500. The test totals 3 hours and 45 minutes.

SAT Math Section

The SAT Math Section totals 70 minutes and is comprised of 54 questions testing basic arithmetic, algebra I & II, and geometry. It's scored on a 200 to 800 point scale. While calculator use is allowed, it is not required.

SAT Critical Reading Section

The SAT Critical Reading Section totals 70 minutes and is comprised of 67 questions. These questions test critical reading as well as diction and vocabulary.

SAT Writing Section (including the essay)

The SAT Writing Section is 60 minutes and is comprised of one 25 minute essay and 49 multiple-choice questions testing grammar, usage, and word choice.

What else do I need to know about SAT scoring?

In March of 2009, the College Board unveiled a new score-reporting policy that will allow students to pick and choose the SAT test scores they want released. Score Choice™

will give students the option to choose their best SAT results to send to colleges. So those terrible scores never need see the light of day.

Score Choice Fast Facts:

- Score Choice is optional and free
- The new policy does not affect scores sent directly to students and their high schools; both will continue to receive all scores
- To take advantage of the new policy, students simply select the test scores they want released according to the date the test was taken; If students DO NOT choose Score Choice, all of their test results will be sent to the schools specified as recipients
- Once the program is launched, students can choose scores from earlier test dates, too
- Only scores from an entire SAT test (Critical Reading, Writing and Mathematics) will be sent; students may not choose individual sections from different test sittings for release.
- Students who choose to send all of their test scores can still do so at no charge
- Students can also choose to release specific, individual SAT Subject Tests, rather than all of their Subject Tests

Learn more about Score Choice at <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/testing>.

What's the Catch?

As good as Score Choice sounds, there is one catch. Colleges can opt out of Score Choice and require applicants to report every SAT score – a few elite schools have already done so, while others say they've yet to decide. So be sure to check in with the schools to which you are applying.

Can I cancel my scores?

Yes. If you finish the test and think you want to cancel your scores, you should ask the test supervisor for a "Request to Cancel Test Scores" form. You can submit the completed form immediately at the testing center, or you can think about it for a day or two before mailing it to ETS. However, ETS must receive your request form no later than the Wednesday after the test.

How important are SAT scores?

The weight placed on SAT scores varies from school to school. Colleges and universities also consider high school grade point average and academic transcript, letters of recommendation, interviews, and personal essays when deciding on admissions. In addition, virtually all U.S. colleges and universities will accept ACT scores in lieu of SAT scores. For more specific information about the weight of your scores, contact the admissions offices at the schools you apply to.

More About the PSAT

The PSAT is a multiple-choice test taken by an estimated 3.4 million high school juniors, sophomores and younger students every year. Though it is a great primer for the SAT

and ACT, keep in mind the PSAT is shorter and has no essay section or Algebra II. The PSAT includes math, critical reading and writing questions.

Why Take It?

The PSAT is essentially a practice test. After taking it, students should have a good sense of their strengths and weaknesses. However, keep in mind that the PSAT is also a qualifying test for National Merit Scholarships and Letters of Commendation, and a high score can help secure scholarship money for college.

How Is It Scored?

There are three sections: Critical Reading; Math; and Writing. Each section is worth 20 to 80 points. You have 2 hours and 10 minutes to complete the test.

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| Math | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Multiple-choice questions, grid-in questions• 50-minute section• Some higher level math problems; no quantitative comparisons |
| Critical Reading | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Multiple-choice questions• 50-minute section |
| Writing | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Multiple-choice questions• 30-minute section |

When Should You Take It?

Although more and more students are taking the PSAT as sophomores and even freshmen, you should plan to take the PSAT in October of your junior year at the very latest. That will still give you time to enroll in one of our SAT prep courses in the winter and be ready to take the SAT the following spring.

How to Register

Sign up at your high school or at a school in your community.

Getting Your Scores

Typically, your guidance counselor will have your score, usually in December or January.

Still have questions? Please call us at 800-2Review (800-273-8439) and speak with a PSAT advisor.