

## What Are College Entrance Tests and How Are They Used?

College entrance tests are a way to predict your ability to perform in college-level classes. Because courses and grading standards differ from high school to high school, entrance tests provide colleges with a standardized method to compare you with other students.

Remember, these tests are just one of many factors considered in the college admissions process. Most colleges also consider your high school academic transcript, extracurricular activities, essays, and teacher recommendations in the admissions process.

## What about Community Colleges?

If you plan to attend a California community college, you will likely be required to take a placement test instead of the SAT or ACT. The placement test scores are used to place you accurately in courses such as English and math. The SAT or ACT is not required for admission to a community college, but is sometimes used for specific majors.

## What Are the Types of Tests?

There are several different types of college entrance tests. For example, most four-year colleges and universities accept the SAT and ACT. These two tests are general in nature and examine reasoning through mathematical problems, reading comprehension, and writing. The PSAT is most often used to prepare students for the SAT. Community colleges most often use placement tests such as the ACCUPLACER/CST.

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## Where Do You Go From Here?

When you are planning for college, look into the college entrance testing requirements for each school. **Statistics about the average scores for incoming freshmen are given for each school in the Admissions section of their Campus Facts profile at CaliforniaColleges.edu.** Contacting the college or university can be the first step in finding out what test or tests you will need to take. A good general rule of thumb in college planning is to start early, so begin thinking about college entrance tests in your sophomore year. Your high school counselor can be an invaluable resource.



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## SAT

The SAT Reasoning Test (formerly known as SAT I) measures critical thinking skills that are considered to be vital to academic success in college and beyond. The test is offered seven times a year in October, November, December, January, March/April, May, and June. The test is divided into three sections: critical reading, writing, and mathematics. You can score between 200 and 800 points on each section.

The critical reading portion of the SAT consists of three sections of short and long reading passages as well as sentence-completion questions. Some questions will test your ability to think carefully about the passage while others will ask about a word's definition based on its context. There will be questions related to information stated in passages and questions that require you to identify writing techniques. Sentence completion questions will assess your logical ability to connect different parts of a sentence and the meaning of words.

The mathematics section consists of three segments of multiple choice and student-produced response questions. Questions in the mathematics section will pertain to geometric sequences, sets, algebra, functions, geometry, measurements, data analysis, statistics, and probability. Approximately ten student-produced response questions will require that you solve a question and fill in the answer on a special grid.

The writing section, introduced in spring 2005, is composed of a short essay and multiple-choice questions. The essay assesses your writing competence based on your ability to express yourself while appropriately organizing and developing ideas and choosing words. The essay is scored by trained high school and college instructors who give each essay a score from one to six, six being the highest. The multiple-choice questions in this section evaluate your ability to identify errors and improve sentences and paragraphs.

After testing, you will receive three scores: one critical reading, one writing, and one math score. Each of these scores can range from 200 to 800. The scores will be combined for a total SAT score.

### What is a Fee Waiver?

College entrance test fee waivers are available for high school juniors and seniors who cannot afford to pay the test fees. Your school counselor can provide you with more information about this program and discuss financial eligibility guidelines.

You must register for the test by the regular registration deadline; fee waivers are not accepted for late or standby registration. If you participate in a fee-waiver service for either the SAT or the ACT, you may also be eligible to waive application fees at colleges to which you apply.

### Preparation

The heart of the SAT is analytical reasoning; therefore, cramming information won't be of much assistance. In general, it is best to use study guides or sample tests to familiarize yourself with the types of questions and reasoning skills used in the exam. An excellent source of information about the SAT is [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com), which offers a test preparation center with test-taking tips, sample tests, and questions of the day. There are also preparatory classes and books with practice exams on CD-ROM, available at local bookstores.

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## When to Take the SAT

At least half of all students take the SAT twice, and there is no limit on the number of times you may take the exam. Unlike the ACT, each SAT test score is reported; however, colleges generally only consider the highest scores across test dates. For example, if you scored 500 (critical reading), 430 (writing), and 400 (math) in January and then a 400 (critical reading), 440 (writing), and 500 (math) in June, some colleges would look at the highest scores in each section (500 critical reading, 440 writing, and 500 math) for a cumulative score of 1440. Some students take the test several times in the hope of achieving a higher score.

## Registration

To register for the SAT, you may obtain a Registration Bulletin from your school counselor and mail in your application. It is also possible to register online by logging on to [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com).

## Cost and Test Dates

- \$43 (Your school counselor can help you determine if you are eligible for a fee waiver.)
- The SAT is given each year in October, November, December, January, March/April, May, and June.

*Contact your high school counselor or the College Board SAT Program for specific dates.*



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## SAT Subject Tests

The SAT Subject Tests measure knowledge in specific subject areas including some subsections:

- Literature
- History (U.S. History and World History)
- Math (Math Level 1 and Math Level 2)
- Science (Biology with either an ecological or molecular focus, Chemistry, and Physics)
- Languages, some with a listening section (Chinese, French, German, Spanish, Modern Hebrew, Italian, Latin, Japanese, and Korean).

All SAT Subject Tests are one-hour, multiple-choice tests. Some colleges may use the tests for admission decisions; other colleges use the SAT Subject Tests for college placement or advising. Some colleges do not accept SAT Subject Test scores at all.

### How to Know if You Have to Take SAT Subject Tests

Check the admission requirements for the colleges you have selected. If you are still unsure, talk with your school counselor or contact admission counselors at the colleges of your choice.

### Preparation

Taking SAT Subject Tests as soon as possible after completing coursework in the subjects being tested will help, because the information will be fresh in your memory. For language tests, however, it is recommended that students wait until after they have completed at least two years of study.

Because SAT Subject Tests determine knowledge of a specific subject, if you continue to study the subject and then retake the test, your score should reflect your increased knowledge. Like the SAT, the scores from each time you take the test are reported.

There are numerous study guides available. Students may also consider visiting the Subject Tests Learning Center at [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) for test-taking tips and practice questions.

### Cost and Test Dates

- \$20 Registration Fee
- \$20 Language Test with Listening
- \$8 Each Additional Subject Test
- The SAT Subject Tests are given each year in October, November, December, January, May, and June, *but not all tests are offered each month. Contact your high school counselor or the College Board SAT Program for specific dates.*

### Average Test Scores

Average test scores vary depending on the subject. Below are average scores for 2007 college-bound seniors from a few of the subject tests.

English (Literature)	583
U.S. History	601
World History	585
Math Level 1	593
Math Level 2	644
Chemistry	629
Spanish	634

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## The PSAT: Preliminary SAT/NMSQT

The Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test measures verbal reasoning as well as critical reading, writing, and mathematical skills. The test is divided into five sections and takes two hours and ten minutes to complete. The PSAT allows you to familiarize yourself with the types of questions found on the SAT and provides valuable feedback on areas where you might benefit from additional study or practice. Because the PSAT has the same kinds of questions as the SAT, it is the best way to practice taking the SAT. When taken in the junior year, it also allows you to qualify for the National Merit Scholarship Corporation's programs, which provide financial assistance for recipients. You will receive scores on each individual section of the PSAT. The scale for scores is 20-80.

### When to Take the PSAT

Students may take the PSAT in the sophomore or junior year. Unlike the SAT and the SAT Subject Tests, PSAT scores are not automatically reported. However, you may opt to have your scores sent to the schools of your choice.

To compete for National Merit Scholarships, you must take the PSAT in your junior year, unless you plan to graduate early. Information about the National Merit Scholarship Corporation is available at [www.nationalmerit.org](http://www.nationalmerit.org).

### Preparation

Challenging courses, problem-solving activities, and a well-established reading practice are the best preparation for the PSAT. You can find practice questions and answers and test-taking tips at [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com).

### Registration

You may register for the PSAT through your high school. Contact your school counselor for more information. Online registration for the PSAT/NMSQT is not available.

### Cost and Test Dates

- \$13
- The high school determines the date that you will take the test and should provide you with registration materials. It is often given in October.

### Scores

Your scores are reported directly to your school. You may not access them online or by phone. Your school is responsible for distributing them and providing extra copies to you. If your scores qualify you to be a Commended Student or Semifinalist in the National Merit Scholarship program, your school will notify you in September of your senior year.

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## ACT Assessment

The ACT Assessment measures skills in English, math, reading, and science reasoning. There is also an optional Writing Test. Unlike the SAT, which measures aptitude, the ACT is curriculum-based, meaning questions directly correspond to high school courses and assess a student's ability to handle college courses. In California, the ACT is offered six times a year in September, October, December, February, April, and June. Questions are multiple-choice, and the entire exam takes just over four hours to complete. (The writing test adds 30 minutes to approximately three hours of actual test-taking time.) You will receive scores on each individual section as well as a composite score. The composite score is the average of these sections. The scale for scores is 1–36.

Test preparation activities to improve test-taking skills and review of content may also help. Test-taking tips and sample questions are also available at [www.act.org](http://www.act.org).

### Preparation

ACT recommends long-term preparation using your high school curriculum to provide the instruction you will need. Research has shown that students who choose to take four or more years of English and three or more years of coursework in math, science, and social studies score better on the ACT regardless of factors such as grade point average, gender, ethnicity, or family income.

## When to Take the ACT

There is no limit on the number of times you may take the ACT. There are, however, restrictions on the time frame between test administrations. You should consider taking the test during your junior year. There are advantages to testing as a junior, such as gaining necessary feedback in time to influence coursework taken in your senior year. Taking the ACT during your junior year also provides the opportunity to take the test again if you feel your scores don't accurately portray your ability. Importantly, students who take the ACT more than once have the option of choosing the date of the scores they wish to submit to colleges during the admissions process.

### Registration

Those wishing to take the ACT may register electronically at [www.act.org](http://www.act.org). Information is also included in a free booklet, "Registering for the ACT Assessment," available from your school counselor or from the ACT Registration Department, P.O. Box 414, Iowa City, IA, 52243-0414. You may also contact ACT by phone at 319-337-1270 and have registration materials mailed to you.

### Cost and Test Dates

- \$30 or \$44.50 with the writing test
- The ACT is given each year in September, October, December, February, April, and June.

*Contact your high school counselor or ACT Universal Testing for specific dates.*

## SAT or ACT: How Do You Know?

Check with your school counselor or the admission offices at the colleges of your choice to see which test is required or recommended.

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