

# A LOOK AT COLLEGE ADMISSIONS TESTS

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The first question that comes to mind when you begin to look at college admissions tests is what do I need to take and when! Essentially there are 2 college admissions tests, the SAT and the ACT. Each offers a pre-test to help familiarize you with the test format. The ACT offers the PLAN test in the fall of your sophomore year and the SAT offers the PSAT in the fall of your junior year. (some schools allow sophomore to take this test as well).

The best advice for high school students planning for college is to work closely with your high school guidance counselor. There are many resources and information available in your guidance office to help you decide what test you should take and when.

The following information is available on-line at [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) for PSAT, SAT I, SAT II and [www.act.org](http://www.act.org) for the PLAN and ACT.

## PLAN

The **PLAN** test is a comprehensive resource, from ACT, that helps students measure their current academic development, explore career/training options, and make plans for the remaining years of high school and post-graduation years.

**PLAN** can help all students—those who are college-bound as well as those who are likely to enter the workforce directly after high school.

As a "pre-ACT" test, **PLAN** is a powerful predictor of success on the ACT Assessment. At the same time, many schools recognize the importance of PLAN testing for all students, as it focuses attention on both career preparation and improving academic achievement. Typically, **PLAN** is administered in the fall of the sophomore year.

## PSAT

The **PSAT/NMSQT** (Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test) is a co-sponsored program by the College Board and [National Merit Scholarship Corporation](http://www.nmsqt.org). For many students, the **PSAT/NMSQT** is the first official step on the road to college. Typically juniors in high school take the **PSAT** in October. The results of this test give you an idea of how you will score on the SAT. The **PSAT** assesses knowledge and skills developed through years of study in a wide range of courses as well as through experiences outside the classroom. PSAT/NMSQT scores are reported on a scale from 20 to 80. Average scores are near the midpoint (50) of the scale.

## SAT I

The **SAT** is an objective, standardized, three-hour test that measures verbal and mathematical reasoning abilities that students develop over time, both in and out of school. Many colleges and universities use the **SAT** for admission purposes because it helps to predict successful performance in college. Typically juniors take the **SAT** in the spring and seniors can take or retake the test in the fall. Scores on the three main sections (critical reading, math and writing) are reported on a scale of 200 to 800.

The content of the SAT Reasoning Test was changed in the March 2005 test administration. The changes bring the test even more in line with what is taught in high school.

**The changes are as follows:**

**Writing:** Students will be asked to write an essay that requires them to take a position on an issue and use examples to support their position. It will be similar to the type of writing required on college tests. Multiple-choice questions will test a student's ability to identify sentence errors, improve sentences, and improve paragraphs.

**Math:** The new math section will include topics from third-year college-preparatory math, such as exponential growth, absolute value, functional notation, and negative and fractional exponents. Greater emphasis will be placed on other topics such as linear functions and scatterplots.

**Critical Reading:** The critical reading section, currently known as the verbal section, will include short and long reading passages. Analogies will be eliminated, and sentence-completion questions will remain.

Also important is what was not changed about the SAT. SAT will still measure the kind of reasoning skills needed for college by assessing how students apply what they have learned in school. Colleges and universities use the SAT as only one of many factors in admissions decisions. The most important factor is high school grades earned in challenging courses. The best preparation for the new SAT – and for college – is for students to take challenging academic courses and to read and write widely.

## SAT II

The **SAT II: Subject Tests** are designed to measure knowledge, and the ability to apply that knowledge, in specific subject areas. Students take the Subject Tests to demonstrate to colleges their mastery of specific subjects like English, history and social studies, mathematics science, and language. The tests are independent of any particular textbook or method of instruction. Students would only take these tests if the college they were applying to require one or more of the **SAT II**. Usually only the more selective colleges require the **SAT II**. The content of the tests evolves to reflect current trends in high school curricula, but the types of questions change little from year to year. Subject Tests fall into five general subject areas:

**English**

Writing  
Literature

**History and Social Studies**

United States History  
World History

**Mathematics**

Math Level IC  
Math Level IIC

**Science**

Biology E/M  
Chemistry  
Physics

**Languages**

Chinese with Listening  
ELPT™  
(English Language Proficiency Test™)  
French  
French with Listening  
German  
German with Listening  
Modern Hebrew  
Italian  
Japanese with Listening  
Korean with Listening  
Latin  
Spanish  
Spanish with Listening

## **ACT**

The **ACT** Assessment, or "A-C-T" as it is commonly called, is a national college admission examination that consists of tests in: ENGLISH, MATH, READING, SCIENCE REASONING.

**Virtually all U.S. colleges and universities accept ACT results.**

The **ACT** includes 215 multiple-choice questions and takes approximately 3 hours and 30 minutes to complete with breaks. Actual testing time is 2 hours and 55 minutes.

In the U.S., the **ACT** is administered on five national test dates, in October, December, February, April, and June. In selected states, the ACT is also offered in late September. Scores for this test are based on a scale of 1 to 36.

## **SEE YOUR COUNSELOR**

All of these tests charge fees. It is very important that you plan ahead and register on time for each of these tests. Work closely with your guidance counselor and they will help you navigate successfully through the college admission process so you will ultimately attend the best college for you!

