

Standardized Testing for College Admissions

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PSAT:

The PSAT is a practice SAT that is offered in October every year. It is usually taken in the junior year and if the student scores well, he/she may qualify for National Merit Scholarship. Some sophomores choose to take this practice test to see what the SAT is all about. Sophomores cannot gain National Merit Scholarship status by taking this test their sophomore year.

SAT:

The SAT I or SAT Reasoning Test is required for admission to many universities and colleges. This test consists of 3 parts; Math, Critical Reading, and an Essay. Each section is scored out of 800 and a composite score of the 3 sections would be out of 2400. Since the Essay portion is still relatively new, some colleges still do not count that score. SAT tests are offered throughout the school year. Generally, juniors take this test in the late winter or spring and then again in the fall of their senior year if they want to improve their score. Sign up for these tests at collegeboard.com

The SAT II or SAT Subject Tests are required by some colleges and universities. Most schools that require these tests want the student to take 2 tests in different subjects. The UCs require 2 of these tests. Princeton, Harvard and Georgetown require 3 SAT subject tests. The subjects to choose from are: Literature, Biology E/M (Ecological or Molecular), Chemistry, Physics, Math Level 1 or 2, U.S. History, World History, French, Spanish, German, Modern Hebrew, Latin, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. The score is out of 800 on each test. Check with each school that you might want to apply to to see what subjects are required or if you need to take tests in different genres. Often schools want you to take the Math 2 test and then something in the languages, English, or history. If you want to study sciences then it makes sense to take a subject test in one of the sciences. If you take the math subject test, the UCs require the Math 2 test. It is best to take a subject test in June right after you have taken the course such as biology or chemistry. Therefore, some freshmen take a SAT II subject test at the end of their freshman year. Math 2 should be taken at least after the student has taken Algebra II. Sign up for these tests at collegeboard.com.

ACT:

The ACT is another test that students can take instead of the SAT. Many colleges and Universities require the ACT or the SAT. The ACT is more content based and the SAT is more reasoning based. They are different tests and most colleges now require one or the other. It is a good idea to try to take practice tests of each type and find out which one you are better suited for and stick to that one. Always check with the schools you are considering applying to to make sure you are taking the appropriate tests. The ACT is scored out of 36 points and has 3 sections, Reading, Math and Writing (optional). Check with the schools you are considering applying to to see if the Writing portion of the test is required. Sign up for this test at actstudent.org.

For many schools, if you choose to take the ACT you may also be required to take some SATII subject tests. Check with the schools that you are considering applying to.

AP:

The AP (Advanced Placement) tests are taken in May during school if the student is in an AP class. AP tests are scored out of 5 and some colleges and universities give college credit depending on the score received.

There are plenty of college test preparation companies that you can sign up with to take classes or get individual tutoring for the SAT and ACT.