

Does the PSAT Matter?

The Beginning of the College Planning Process

Registering for and taking the PSAT is a milestone for many high school students. Like a rite of passage, it may mark the start of the college planning process. As the first official step in the race towards college acceptance, the PSAT will show you how you'll fare against the competition – the thousands of fellow high school students from across the nation who will also be applying to your selected colleges.

What Does "PSAT" Stand For?

Technically, the PSAT should be written as "PSAT/NMSQT" and stands for Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test. Like the SAT, it is a standardized test administered by the College Board; however, the National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) also has a stake in this event as they sponsor the scholarship portion of this exam.

Scholarship Potential

The PSAT has the added incentive of a fantastic scholarship opportunity. Should you do very well in the PSAT/NMSQT (95th – 99th percentile), you may qualify for the prestigious National Merit Scholarship, and this looks great on college applications. Of note, only juniors are eligible for the National Merit Scholarship.

- Your scores on the PSAT are used for awarding many scholarships including about 8,200 National Merit Scholarships.
- If you are a National Merit finalist (or sometimes even a semi-finalist or commended student), many corporations use this honor to award their own scholarships.
- Hundreds of colleges guarantee additional Merit Scholarships to National Merit finalists.
- Many colleges, in an effort to attract the best students and boost their reputations, offer significant institutional grants (sometimes even free tuition) to National Merit finalists. National Merit finalists are aggressively recruited by colleges.
- The PSAT is quite similar to the SAT, so the exam will give you a good indication of your level of preparedness for the SAT. If you do poorly on the PSAT, this is a sign that you need to do some meaningful preparation before taking the SAT.
- In the winter after you take the PSAT, colleges will probably begin sending unsolicited mail to you. While much of this mail may end up in the recycling bin, it's useful for seeing how different colleges try to distinguish themselves. The

college brochures also give you useful information for figuring out which types of schools are of most interest to you, and which schools are most interested in you.

To reiterate the financial picture -- the combination of a National Merit Scholarship, corporate scholarships, college scholarships, and college grants can add up to tens of thousands of dollars.

Student Entry Requirements – From the National Merit Scholarship Program - <http://www.nationalmerit.org/nmsp.php>

To participate in the National Merit® Scholarship Program, a student must:

1. take the PSAT/NMSQT® in the specified year of the high school program and **no later than** the third year in grades 9 through 12, *regardless of grade classification or educational pattern*;
2. be enrolled as a high school student, progressing normally toward graduation or completion of high school, and planning to enroll full time in college no later than the fall following completion of high school; and
3. be a citizen of the United States; or be a U.S. lawful permanent resident (or have applied for permanent residence, the application for which has not been denied) and intend to become a U.S. citizen at the earliest opportunity allowed by law.

Frequently Asked Questions From

Competition Steps

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How does a high school student enter NMSC's scholarship programs?

To enter the competition, a high school student must take the PSAT/NMSQT® at their high school or approved location in the specified year of high school and

meet NMSC's published program participation requirements. See "Entering the Competitions" for further information.

If a student took the PSAT/NMSQT® as a sophomore, does he/she need to take it again?

Yes, if the student is spending the usual four years in grades 9 through 12. See "Entering the Competitions" for further information.

Can a homeschooled student take the PSAT/NMSQT®?

Yes, but the test must be administered at a local high school or approved location. Contact the principal or guidance counselor well in advance of the test day to make arrangements to take the PSAT/NMSQT at that school.

What if a student misses the PSAT/NMSQT®?

A student who misses the PSAT/NMSQT test due to illness, an emergency, or other extenuating circumstance, but meets all other requirements for NMSC program participation, may still be able to enter the competitions.

What should a student do if the PSAT/NMSQT® Score Report Plus indicates that entry requirements for NMSC programs were not met?

Compare responses to the entry items on the student's score report to the requirements listed on the National Merit® Scholarship Program and National Achievement® Scholarship Program pages. Entry requirements are also listed in the *PSAT/NMSQT Official Student Guide*. If the student made an error or plans have changed, WRITE immediately to NMSC about it and NMSC will review the student's record.

How many program participants are honored annually?

A total of about 55,000 participants receive recognition in the National Merit® Program and the National Achievement® Program.

When and how are students notified they are Semifinalists?

Semifinalists are notified through their schools in early September. Semifinalists who are homeschooled are notified at their home addresses. See the National Merit® Scholarship Program and National Achievement® Scholarship Program pages for additional information about each program.

How does a Semifinalist become a Finalist?

Semifinalists must fulfill several requirements, which are provided in materials they receive with their scholarship application and are also listed in the *PSAT/NMSQT® Official Student Guide*. These include completing an application,

having a consistently very high academic record, writing an essay, being endorsed and recommended by a school official, and taking the SAT® and earning a score that confirms the PSAT/NMSQT performance. Click here to view the leaflet *Requirements and Instructions for Semifinalists in the 2010 National Merit® Scholarship Program*. Click here to view the corresponding leaflet in the 2010 National Achievement® Scholarship Program. (Adobe Acrobat Reader is required.) For more information regarding the SAT test, please visit the website of the College Board, which cosponsors the PSAT/NMSQT.

When and how are Semifinalists notified if they have advanced to Finalist standing?

Finalists are notified in early February by mail at their home addresses. See the National Merit® Scholarship Program and National Achievement® Scholarship Program pages for additional details.

How does a Semifinalist/Finalist report a college choice or change?

All reports of a college choice or change must be submitted in writing and require a signature. Complete and mail or fax (847/866-5113) to NMSC the *College Choice: Report or Change* postcard, included in the *Semifinalist Packet*, or download a PDF of the **National Merit Program** postcard or the **National Achievement Program** postcard. (Adobe Acrobat Reader is required.) Complete the postcard PDF. Then print, sign, and fax or mail to NMSC. Key dates for college-sponsored award consideration in the National Merit® Program are given in materials enclosed in the *Semifinalist Packet*. To view these dates, scroll to page 3 of the leaflet *Requirements and Instructions for Semifinalists in the 2010 National Merit® Scholarship Program*. (Adobe Acrobat Reader is required.)

National Achievement Scholarship Program – Taken from NASP Web Site -
<http://www.nationalmerit.org/nasp.php#entryreq>

The **National Achievement® Scholarship Program** is an academic competition established in 1964 to provide recognition for outstanding Black American high school students. Black students may enter both the National Achievement Program and the National Merit® Program by taking the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test ([PSAT/NMSQT®](#)) and meeting other published requirements for participation.

To participate in the National Achievement® Scholarship Program, a student must:

1. take the [PSAT/NMSQT®](#) in the specified year of the high school program and **no later than** the third year in grades 9 through 12, *regardless of grade classification or educational pattern*;
2. request entry to the National Achievement Program by marking Section 14 on the PSAT/NMSQT answer sheet, thereby identifying himself or herself as a Black American who wishes to be considered in this competition as well as in the National Merit® Scholarship Program;
3. be enrolled as a high school student, progressing normally toward graduation or completion of high school, and planning to enroll full time in college no later than the fall following completion of high school; and
4. be a citizen of the United States; or be a U.S. lawful permanent resident (or have applied for permanent residence, the application for which has not been denied) and intend to become a U.S. citizen at the earliest opportunity allowed by law.