

High School Placement Test

During a student's four year journey through high school a number of Tests are taken each year to help prepare the student for college and career exploration. What follows is a write-up I put together that explains the tests and the differences among them.

The EXPLORE Test - Freshman

Taking EXPLORE® in 8th or 9th grade tells you things you need to know—to plan your high school courses, prepare for the ACT, or choose a career direction.

EXPLORE includes four multiple-choice tests:

Subject	Number of Questions	How Long It Takes
English	40	30 minutes
Math	30	30 minutes
Reading	30	30 minutes
Science	28	30 minutes

Your skills in these subjects will make a big difference—in school and, eventually, in your career. Notice the test subject areas are the same as the PLAN and ACT Tests. When students receive their Explore test results they will also receive an estimated Plan Test Score.

Once you know what each test covers, your EXPLORE test results can show you where you're strong or weak. <http://www.actstudent.org/explore/>

The PLAN Test is administered to **Sophomores** for the dual purpose of providing students with an estimated ACT Score as well as career interest information. Score results allow students to compare their achievement levels in the four core areas (Reading, English, Math and Science) with college readiness benchmarks. The “World of Work Map” pictured on the student’s individual results page encourages career exploration.

<http://www.actstudent.org/plan/>

The PSAT/NMSQT (Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test) is a qualifying test for scholarship competitions given by the National Merit Scholarship Program and is available to **Juniors**. The test is given at Cabrini in Mid-October. All Cabrini High School students will take this test in their junior year and they qualify to compete in the scholarship program (see more links on Dream Mentor program web site for PSAT). The same types of topics included in the SAT are incorporated into the PSAT. This test is two hours and ten minutes in length broken down into four 25- minute sections (two critical reading and two math and one 30-minute writing skills section).

Before you take the SAT, you'll take the **PSAT/NMSQT** (it's co-sponsored by the National Merit Scholarship Corp., which, along with other scholarship funds, uses the scores to select scholarship recipients). The PSAT is similar to the SAT I except that it is a half-hour shorter and includes a grammar section that's absent from the SAT I.

<http://www.nationalmerit.org/>

The ACT Assessment, administered by the American College Testing Program (ACT), is a four-part test of the abilities, which students will need to succeed in college work. It is normally taken in the **Junior** but can be taken as a **Sophomore** too. It deals with the use of rhetorical and reasoning skills more than with specific subject matter. The test gives four scores – English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science Reasoning. All are scored on a 1-36 scale; the composite is the average of the four area scores. There is no penalty for guessing, so it is advantageous to attempt to answer every question. Students are permitted to use calculators. ACT also has a 30-minute Writing Test as an **option**. This Writing Test will complement the English Test. The combined information from both tests will tell post secondary institutions about student’s understanding of the conventions of standard written English and their ability to produce a direct sample of writing. I highly recommend taking the Writing Test (many colleges request this score). If you have a good writing score you do **not** have to retake the writing test if you are retaking the subject area portion of the test.

<http://www.act.org/>

ACT + Writing:

The ACT + Writing consist of four multiple-choice tests: English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science along with a Writing component.

Test			Content
English	75 questions	45 minutes	Measures standard written English and rhetorical skills.
Mathematics	60 questions	60 minutes	Measures mathematical skills students have typically acquired in courses taken up to the beginning of grade 12.
Reading	40 questions	35 minutes	Measures reading comprehension.
Science	40 questions	35 minutes	Measures the interpretation, analysis, evaluation, reasoning, and problem-solving skills required in the natural sciences.
Writing Test	1 prompt	30 minutes	Measures writing skills emphasized in high school English classes and in entry-level college composition courses.

The SAT Reasoning Test is a measure of the critical thinking skills you'll need for academic success in college. The SAT assesses how well you analyze and solve problems – skills you learned in school that you will need in college.

It is normally taken in the **Junior** but can be taken as a **Sophomore** too.

Each section of the SAT is scored on a scale of 200-800, and the writing section will contain two sub-scores. The SAT is typically taken by high school juniors and seniors.

SAT Question Types

Each edition of the SAT includes a Critical Reading, Math, and Writing section, with a specific number of questions related to content.

The Critical Reading Section

The critical reading section, formerly known as the verbal section, will include short reading passages along with the existing long reading passages. Analogies have been eliminated, but sentence-completion questions and passage-based reading questions remain.

The Mathematics Section

The SAT will include expanded math topics, such as exponential growth, absolute value, and functional notation, and place greater emphasis on such other topics as linear functions, manipulations with exponents, and properties of tangent lines. Important skills formerly measured in the quantitative comparison format, such as estimation and number sense, will continue to be measured through the multiple choice and student response (grid-in) questions. Can I use a calculator? Students can use a four-function, scientific or graphing calculator. The College Board recommends that

students use a calculator at least at the scientific level for the SAT, although it's still possible to solve every question without a calculator.

The Math Section has two types of questions: Multiple Choice and Student Produced Response Questions.

The Writing Section

Short Essay – The short essay measures your ability to:

- Organize and express ideas clearly
- Develop and support the main idea
- Use appropriate word choice and sentence structure

You'll be asked to develop a point of a view on an issue, using reasoning and evidence – based on your own experiences, readings, or observations – to support your ideas.

The essay will be scored by trained high school and college teachers. Each reader will give the essay a score from 1 to 6 (6 is the highest score) based on the overall quality of the essay and your demonstration of writing competence.

Multiple-Choice – The multiple-choice writing questions measure your ability to:

- Improve sentences and paragraphs
- Identify errors (such as diction, grammar, sentence construction, subject-verb agreement, proper word usage, and wordiness).

<http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/about.html>

SAT SUBJECT TESTS:

Subject Tests (formerly SAT II: Subject Tests) are designed to measure your knowledge and skills in particular subject areas, as well as your ability to apply that knowledge. Students take the Subject Tests to demonstrate to colleges their mastery of specific subjects like English, history, mathematics, science, and language. The tests are independent of any particular textbook or method of instruction. The tests content evolves to reflect current trends in high school curricula, but the types of questions change little from year to year. Some colleges use the Subject Tests for admission, for course placement, and to advise students about course selection. Used in combination with other background information (your high school record, scores from other tests like the SAT Reasoning Test, teacher recommendations, etc.), they provide a dependable measure of your academic achievement and are a good predictor of future performance.

Some colleges specify the Subject Tests they require for admission or placement; others allow applicants to choose which tests to take. Check the requirements of the colleges where you might apply before deciding which test, if any, you will need to take.

ACT vs SAT Comparison Chart

SAT	vs.	ACT
reasoning test	Type of Test	content-based test
Critical Reading: 2, 25-min sections and 1, 20-min section; Math: 2, 25-min sections and 1, 20-min section; Writing: 1, 25-min essay, 1, 25-min section, and 1, 10-min section	Test Format	English: 1, 45-min section; Math: 1, 60-min section; Reading: 1, 35-min section; Science: 1, 35-min section; Writing: 1, 30-min essay (optional)
reading, vocabulary, grammar & usage, writing, and math	Content Covered	grammar & usage, math, reading, science reasoning, and writing (optional)
tricky, questions can be phrased in ways that make them difficult to decipher	Test Style	straightforward, questions may be long but are usually less difficult to decipher
Math, Critical Reading, and Writing scores will each range between a 200-800; total SAT score ranges between 600-2400	Scoring	English, Math, Reading, and Science scores will each range between 1-36. Composite ACT score is the average of your scores on the four sections; ranges between 1-36
yes – you lose ¼ of a point for incorrect answers (except on the grid-in math questions)	Penalty for Wrong Answers?	no – you do not lose points for incorrect answers
yes – you can choose which set(s) of SAT scores to submit to colleges	Score Choice?	yes – you can choose which set(s) of ACT scores to submit to colleges
questions increase in difficulty level as you move through that question type in a section (except reading passage questions, which progress chronologically through the passage)	Difficulty Levels	difficulty level of the questions is random
arithmetic, data analysis, algebra I and II, functions, geometry; formulas are provided in the test booklet	Math Levels	arithmetic, algebra I and II, functions, geometry, trigonometry; no formulas are provided
private schools; schools on the east and west coasts	Preferred by?	public schools; schools in the Midwest and south; however,

		every four-year college in the US accepts ACT scores
seven times per year: January, March or April, May, June, October, November, December	Offered when?	six times per year: February, April, June, September, October, December (note that some states offer the ACT as part of their state testing requirements; these tests are not administered on the national test dates)
typically about four weeks before the test date	Registration deadline?	typically about five to six weeks before the test date
www.collegeboard.com	More Information	www.act.org

Advanced Placement Exams are available to students enrolled in Advanced Placement classes; these students are expected to take the A. P. exams administered on national test dates in May. Satisfactory scores, as determined by each college/university, may result in college credit. Scores range from 1-5.

<http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/ap/about.html>