What Are College Entrance Tests and How Are They Used?

Because courses and grading standards differ from high school to high school, college entrance tests provide colleges with a standardized method to compare you with other students. These tests are one tool used to predict your academic performance in college-level courses.

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

What Are the Types of Tests?

There are several different 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 skills through mathematical problems, reading comprehension, and writing. Community colleges use diagnostic placement tests which might include COMPASS, ACCUPLACER/CPT, ASSET, and the new North Carolina Diagnostic Assessment and Placement Test (NCDAP).
SAT
The SAT measures critical thinking skills that are considered vital to academic success in college and beyond. The total possible score range is 400-1600. The SAT will be based on “rights-only” scoring, e.g., you receive a point for a correct answer but no deduction for an incorrect answer.

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 collegeboard.org, which offers a test preparation center with test-taking tips, sample tests, and questions of the day. College Board has a new partnership with Khan Academy (khanacademy.org) to offer a more personalized online option for SAT practice.

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. Many students take the SAT once or twice during their sophomore or junior year as a diagnostic tool, and again in October of their senior year. Colleges generally consider the highest scores across test dates (called super-scoring).

SAT Subject Tests
The SAT Subject Tests measure knowledge in the following subject areas (including some subsections).

- English (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. Check the admissions requirements for the colleges you have selected to see if any SAT Subject Tests are required or recommended.

Preparation
Taking SAT Subject Tests as soon as possible after completing course work 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.

Cost and Test Dates
- $26 registration fee
- Plus $26 language test with listening
- Plus $16 each additional subject test

For more information visit collegeboard.org

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Students with Special Needs
Special arrangements are available for students with disabilities, as well as those who cannot test on Saturday for religious reasons. Fee waivers may be available for students who demonstrate financial need.
**ACT**

The ACT measures skills in English, math, reading, and science reasoning. 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. There is also an optional Writing Test. The ACT is curriculum-based, meaning questions directly correspond to high school courses and assess a student’s ability to handle college courses. In North Carolina, the ACT may be offered during a regular school day at your public high school. Questions are multiple-choice, and the entire exam takes just over four hours to complete.

**Preparation**

ACT recommends long-term preparation using your high school curriculum to provide the instruction you will need. Test preparation activities to improve test-taking skills and review of content may also help. Also, check out College Test Prep at CFNC.org. Test-taking tips and sample questions are also available at actstudent.org.

**When to Take the ACT**

There is no limit to 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 course work 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.

**Cost**

- $38 or $54.50 with the Writing Test

*For more information visit actstudent.org*
Community College Placement Tests

Under the new Multiple Measures policy, if you graduated from high school within the last five years, you may not have to take placement tests if you have an unweighted GPA of at least 2.6, along with an appropriate, approved 4th math. If your GPA is below 2.6 and you have not taken an appropriate 4th math course, the college will consider your ACT or SAT scores:

**English:**
- ACT Reading 20 OR ACT English 18
- SAT Writing 500 OR SAT Critical Reading 500
  (If taken prior to March 2016)
- SAT Evidence Based Reading 480
  (Beginning March 2016)

**Math:**
- ACT Math 22
- SAT Math 500 (If taken prior to March 2016)
- SAT Math 530 (Beginning March 2016)

If neither your recent GPA nor your ACT or SAT scores meet benchmarks, then you’ll need to take a diagnostic placement test. If you need to take a placement test, you may take the NC Diagnostic Assessment and Placement (NCDAP).

**Preparation**
If you would like to brush up on a particular area, focus your skills in English and math. For English, you may find it helpful to spend some time reading and looking up words you do not understand. You might practice writing an essay or review basic grammar. Math topics may include pre-algebra, elementary and intermediate algebra, geometry, and trigonometry. It might be helpful to work out some math problems beforehand. For additional suggestions, you may talk to the admissions office before taking the placement test.

**When to Take Community College Placement Tests**
Placement tests are typically taken in the spring, prior to graduating from high school. North Carolina community colleges administer the tests to students prior to their enrolling in community college courses. Contact your community college to arrange a time to take a test. Some community colleges will allow you to retake a placement test to improve your score.

**Test Dates**
Contact your community college admissions office for test dates, times, and fee information.

**For more information**
COMPASS and ASSET
act.org/compass
act.org/asset
ACCUPLACER/CPT
collegeboard.org/student/testing/accuplacer