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Standardized testing in the college process

This article and linked resources will provide an overview of college admissions standardized testing and can be used by PCs and mentors to help students prepare for tests. Taking standardized tests is often one of the most stressful and dreaded tasks for students preparing for college. Standardized tests are designed to assess a students' academic readiness for college and many colleges often require students to submit standardized test scores as part of their college applications. Read on to learn about resources and how to best support students!

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What is the SAT?

The SAT is a 3-hour 45-minute test on reading, writing, and math skills. There are multiple choice questions and writing sections. The SAT contains three sections:

1. **Critical Reading:** includes reading passages and sentence completions
2. **Writing:** includes a short essay and multiple choice questions on grammar and usage
3. **Mathematics:** includes questions on arithmetic, algebra, geometry, statistics, and probability

Here are some useful links to help students get familiar with and prepare for the

SAT:

[SAT question breakdown](#)

[How the SAT is scored](#)

[SAT test day checklist](#)

[SAT test day tips & policies](#)

Please note that there will be a newly redesigned SAT starting in March 2016. Learn more [here](#).

What is the ACT?

The ACT is a 3-hour 30-minute multiple choice test on English, mathematics, reading, and science. The ACT also has an optional 40-minute writing test. Students should confirm whether their colleges require the ACT writing test before registering.

Here are some useful links to help students get familiar with and prepare for the ACT:

[ACT test descriptions](#)

[Understanding your ACT score](#)

[ACT Test day checklist](#)

[ACT Test day tips](#)

Difference between the SAT and ACT

One of the differences between the SAT and ACT is that the SAT primarily assess critical reasoning abilities, while the ACT measures overall knowledge from academic subjects. Most colleges and universities place equal weight on the SAT and ACT so students should research and understand the format and content tested on each to determine which test is right for them: [SAT question breakdown](#) | [ACT test descriptions](#). While some students do take both tests, it might be more effective to spend time preparing for the test that caters to a student's strengths.

When to take the SAT or ACT

Both the SAT and ACT are offered several times a year. Most students take the SAT and ACT for the first time during the spring semester of their junior year and a second time during the fall semester of their senior year. Help students plan ahead and register for the SAT or ACT by viewing the [SAT test schedule](#) and [ACT test schedule](#).

Registering for the SAT or ACT and fee waivers

Students can register for the SAT or ACT online: [SAT registration](#) | [ACT registration](#). Be sure to note registration deadlines for each test date.

Both the SAT and ACT require registration fees ([SAT fees](#) | [ACT fees](#)). However, students should check-in with their high school college counselor to see if they qualify for a fee waiver.

Sending your SAT or ACT scores

Students must send their SAT or ACT scores to colleges as part of the college application process.

- **SAT Scores:** Students receive up to four score reports with registration. These score reports must be used at the time of registration or up to nine days after the test date. Additional score reports are subject to a fee per report. However, students should check-in with their high school college counselor to see if they qualify for a score report fee waiver.
- **ACT Scores:** Students receive up to four score reports with registration. These score reports must be used at the time of registration. Additional score reports are subject to a fee per report.

How important are standardized tests?

Students should keep in mind that standardized tests are only just one factor among many used by colleges in the admissions process. Colleges will also consider other factors, such as GPA, class rank, strength of high school curriculum, extracurricular activities, recommendations, and personal statements. Advise students to research and contact each school's admissions office to learn about specific admissions criteria.

Standardized test-optional colleges

There are a number of 4-year colleges or universities and community colleges that are "test-optional," which means that standardized test scores are not used when making admission decisions. Instead, the school may consider a student's GPA, class rank, and other criteria. Some schools may also use SAT/ACT scores for placement purposes only

or require school-specific placement tests or exams in place of SAT/ACT scores.

Advise students to consider test-optional schools while creating their college lists. Students can view a list of test-optional schools [here](#). However, it is important that students still research or confirm with each school's admissions office to learn more about specific admissions requirements.

What is the PSAT/NMSQT?

The [PSAT/NMSQT](#) (preliminary-SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test) is a 2-hour 45-minute test on reading, writing, and math. It is closely aligned with the knowledge and skills tested on the SAT, which makes it an excellent opportunity to practice for the SAT.

Students typically take the PSAT/NMSQT in the fall semester of their junior year. Schools administer the PSAT/NMSQT in October each year and students must sign up for the test with their school college counselor.

Here are some useful links to help students get familiar with and prepare for the PSAT/NMSQT:

[PSAT/NMSQT practice questions](#)

[PSAT/NMSQT test dates](#)

[PSAT/NMSQT test day tips](#)

Taking the PSAT/NMSQT also automatically screens students for the [National Merit Scholarship Program](#) and offers students the opportunity to opt-in to [Student Search Service](#), which shares students' information with scholarship programs and colleges.

Test Preparation Resources

The best way to prepare for standardized tests is to study and practice! Here are some online resources to help students study and prepare for the SAT, ACT, and PSAT/NMSQT:

[SAT: Khan Academy SAT Test Prep](#) | [CollegeBoard SAT practice test](#) |

[CollegeBoard SAT practice questions](#)

In addition to sharing these online resources with students, advise students to ask their school college counselor if there are free test preparation courses in their communities.

The role of iMentor in college admissions standardized testing

Schools often provide various levels of support for students when it comes to college admissions standardized tests. Supports typically include registering students for tests and providing test preparation or connecting students to test preparation resources in the community. It's important that the PC connect with the school college counselor prior to the start of the school year to learn more about the school's specific standardized testing process.

In addition to reading this Learning Center article and connecting with the school college counselor, here are other ways that iMentor can support students to prepare for college standardized tests:

Program Coordinator

- Remind students about upcoming standardized test dates and registration deadlines
- Direct students and mentors to resources, such as the ones listed in this article or to other resources in the community (free test preparation courses)

Mentor

- Remind students about upcoming standardized test dates and registration deadlines
- Share study tips and help students to create and follow-through on a study plan
- Encourage and motivate students!
- Share test preparation resources listed in this article or connect students to other resources in their community (free test preparation courses)

- Help students to understand that standardized tests are one factor among many in the college admissions process

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