

College Entrance Tests

What Are College Entrance Tests and How Are They Used?

College entrance tests are a way to predict your ability to perform in college-level classes. Because courses and grading standards differ from high school to high school, entrance tests provide colleges with a standardized method to compare you with other students.

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

What about Community Colleges?

If you plan to attend a North Carolina community college, you will likely be required to take a placement test instead of the SAT or ACT. The placement test scores are used to place you accurately in courses such as English and math. The SAT or ACT is not required for admission to a community college, but is sometimes used for specific majors.

What Are the Types of Tests?

There are several different types of 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 through mathematical problems, reading comprehension, and writing. The PSAT is most often used to prepare students for the SAT. Community colleges most often use placement tests. The three placement tests that are used in North Carolina are the COMPASS, ACCUPLACER/CPT, and ASSET tests.

Where Do You Go From Here?

When you are planning for college, look into the college entrance testing requirements for each school. Contacting the college or university can be the first step in finding out what test or tests you will need to take. A good general rule of thumb in college planning is to start early, so begin thinking about college entrance tests in your sophomore year. Your high school counselor can be an invaluable resource.

If you have questions about any of these tests or need further information, call 866-866-CFNC or visit CFNC.org.



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*ACT Assessment, ASSET, COMPASS are registered trademarks of ACT.

SAT

The SAT Reasoning Test (formerly known as SAT I) measures critical thinking skills that are considered to be vital to academic success in college and beyond. The test is offered seven times a year in October, November, December, January, March/April, May, and June. The test is divided into three sections: critical reading, writing, and mathematics. You can score between 200 and 800 points on each section.

The critical reading portion of the SAT consists of three sections of short and long reading passages as well as sentence-completion questions. Some questions will test your ability to think carefully about the passage while others will ask about a word's definition based on its context. There will be questions related to information stated in passages and questions that require you to identify writing techniques. Sentence completion questions will assess your logical ability to connect different parts of a sentence and the meaning of words.

The mathematics section consists of three segments of multiple choice and student-produced response questions. Questions in the mathematics section will pertain to geometric sequences, sets, algebra, functions, geometry, measurements, data analysis, statistics, and probability. Approximately ten student-produced response questions will require that you solve a question and fill in the answer on a special grid.

The writing section, introduced in spring 2005, is composed of a short essay and multiple-choice questions. The essay assesses your writing competence based on your ability to express yourself while appropriately organizing and developing ideas and choosing words. The essay will be scored by trained high school and college instructors who will give each essay a score from one to six, six being the highest. The multiple-choice questions in this section evaluate your ability to identify errors and improve sentences and paragraphs.

After testing, you will receive three scores: one critical reading, one writing, and one math score. Each of these scores can range from 200 to 800. The scores will be combined for a total SAT score.

How Has the SAT Changed?

In 2005, the SAT I added a writing section and the name changed to the SAT Reasoning Test. The section formerly known as the Verbal Reasoning Test has been renamed the Critical Reading Test, and analogies from this section have been replaced with more critical reading passages.

The math segment of the SAT Reasoning Test now includes topics from Algebra II, but quantitative comparisons have been eliminated.

In addition, the SAT II has been renamed the SAT Subject Test(s).

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, www.collegeboard.com, offers a test preparation center with test-taking tips, sample tests, and questions of the day. At CFNC.org, you can prepare by using the tools in **College Test Prep**. There are also preparatory classes and books with practice exams on CD-ROM. Don't forget that publications such as Peterson's *The Insider's Guide to the SAT* and *Lovejoy's College Guide* provide great ideas and resources for college testing.



On the **CFNC.org** home page, you will find **Test Prep**, a direct link to test preparation tutorials for SAT and ACT college entrance tests, including a 2,000+ word *Vocabulary Builder* and a place for you to include direct e-mail contact with a coach, parent, or teacher to mentor you along the way. At **Test Prep** you can

- learn new words adapted specifically to your learning ability and selected to challenge you;
- answer practice questions;
- review the writing process and analyze a sample SAT essay; and
- let your mentor know how you are doing and where you might need extra help.

Fifteen minutes on **Test Prep** every day can make a difference, and it's free.

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. Unlike the ACT, each SAT test score is reported; however, colleges generally only consider the highest scores across test dates. For example, if you scored 500 (critical reading), 430 (writing), and 400 (math) in January and then a 400 (critical reading), 440 (writing), and 500 (math) in June, some colleges would look at the highest scores in each section (500 critical reading, 440 writing, and 500 math) for a cumulative score of 1440. Some students take the test several times in the hope of achieving a higher score.

Registration

To register for the SAT, you may obtain a Registration Bulletin from your school counselor and mail in your application. It is also possible to register online by logging on to **www.collegeboard.com**.

Cost and Test Dates

- \$41.50 (Your school counselor can help you determine if you are eligible for a fee waiver.)
- The SAT is given each year in October, November, December, January, March/April, May, and June.

Contact your high school counselor or the College Board SAT Program for specific dates.

Average Test Scores (SAT I)

	<u>2004 National</u>	<u>2004 N.C.</u>
Verbal	508	499
Math	518	507
Total SAT I	1026	1006



SAT Subject Test(s)

Formerly known as SAT II: Subject Tests, the SAT Subject Test(s) measure knowledge in specific subject areas including some subsections:

- 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 Test(s) are one-hour, multiple-choice tests. Some colleges may use the tests for admission decisions; other colleges use the SAT Subject Test(s) for college placement or advising. Some colleges do not accept SAT Subject Test scores at all.

How to Know if You Have to Take SAT Subject Test(s)

Check the admission requirements for the colleges you have selected. If you are still unsure, talk with your school counselor or contact admission counselors at the colleges of your choice.

Preparation

Taking SAT Subject Test(s) as soon as possible after completing coursework 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.

Because SAT Subject Test(s) determine knowledge of a specific subject, if you continue to study the subject and then retake the test, your score should reflect your increased knowledge. Like the SAT, the scores from each time you take the test are reported.

There are numerous study guides available. Students may also consider visiting the *SAT Subject Tests Learning Center* at www.collegeboard.com for test-taking tips and practice questions.

Cost and Test Dates

- \$17 Registration Fee
- \$18 Language Test with Listening
- \$8 Each Additional Subject Test
- The SAT Subject Test(s) are given each year in October, November, December, January, May, and June, *but not all tests are offered each month.*

Contact your high school counselor or the College Board SAT Program for specific dates.

Average Test Scores

Average test scores vary depending on the subject. Below are average scores for 2004 college-bound seniors from a few of the subject tests.

English (Writing)	604
English (Literature)	590
U.S. History	603
World History	578
Math Level 1C	586
Chemistry	612
Spanish	622

For More Information

College Board SAT Program
P.O. Box 6200
Princeton, NJ 08541-6200
609-771-7600
609-771-7137 (for students with disabilities)
609-882-4118 (TTY)
www.collegeboard.com

The PSAT: Preliminary SAT/NMSQT

The Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test measures verbal reasoning as well as critical reading, writing, and mathematical skills. The test is divided into five sections and takes two hours and ten minutes to complete. The PSAT allows you to familiarize yourself with the types of questions found on the SAT and provides valuable feedback on areas where you might benefit from additional study or practice. Because the PSAT has the same kinds of questions as the SAT, it is the best way to practice taking the SAT. When taken in the junior year, it also allows you to qualify for the National Merit Scholarship Corporation's programs, which provide financial assistance for recipients.

When to Take the PSAT

Students may take the PSAT in the sophomore or junior year. Unlike the SAT and the SAT Subject Test(s), PSAT scores are not automatically reported. However, you may opt to have your scores sent to the schools of your choice.

To compete for National Merit Scholarships, you must take the PSAT in your junior year, unless you plan to graduate early. Information about the National Merit Scholarship Corporation is available at www.nationalmerit.org.

Preparation

Challenging courses, problem-solving activities, and a well-established reading practice are the best preparation for the PSAT. You can find practice questions and answers and test-taking tips at www.collegeboard.com.

Registration

You may register for the PSAT through your high school. Contact your school counselor for more information. Online registration for the PSAT/NMSQT is not available.

Cost and Test Dates

- \$11
- The high school determines the date that you will take the test and should provide you with registration materials. It is often given in October.

Scores

Your scores are reported directly to your school. You may not access them online or by phone. Your school is responsible for distributing them and providing extra copies to you. If your scores qualify you to be a Commended Student or Semifinalist in the National Merit Scholarship program, your school will notify you in September of your senior year.

Average Test Scores

Juniors 2004

	<u>National</u>	<u>N.C.</u>
Critical Reading	46.9	45.6
Math	48.8	48.1
Writing	50.5	48.8

Sophomores 2004

	<u>National</u>	<u>N.C.</u>
Critical Reading	42.5	42.4
Math	44.2	45.1
Writing	46.4	46

For More Information

PSAT/NMSQT Office
P.O. Box 6720
Princeton, NJ 08541-6720
609-771-7070
609-882-4118 (TTY)
www.collegeboard.com

Students with Special Needs

Special arrangements are available for students who are disabled as well as those with religious objections to Saturday test dates. Fee waivers may be available for students who demonstrate financial need.

ACT Assessment

The ACT Assessment measures skills in English, math, reading, and science reasoning. There is also an optional Writing Test. Unlike the SAT, which measures aptitude, 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 is offered six times a year in September, October, December, February, April, and June. Questions are multiple-choice, and the entire exam takes just over four hours to complete. (The writing test adds 30 minutes to approximately three hours of actual test-taking time.) 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.

Students who plan to take the ACT and hope to attend one of the 16 UNC campuses must take the ACT with the Writing Test. Other colleges in the state may also require the ACT Writing Test. Check with individual college admission offices to see what is required.

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 www.act.org.

Preparation

ACT recommends long-term preparation using your high school curriculum to provide the instruction you will need. Research has shown that students who choose to take four or more years of English and three or more years of coursework in math, science, and social studies score better on the ACT regardless of factors such as grade point average, gender, ethnicity, or family income.

When to Take the ACT

There is no limit on 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 coursework 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.

Registration

Those wishing to take the ACT may register electronically at www.act.org. Information is also included in a free booklet, "Registering for the ACT Assessment," available from your school counselor or from the ACT Registration Department, P.O. Box 168, Iowa City, IA, 52243-0414. You may also contact ACT by phone at 319-337-1270 and have registration materials mailed to you.

Cost and Test Dates

- \$28 or \$42 with the writing test
- The ACT is given each year in September, October, December, February, April, and June.

Contact your high school counselor or ACT Universal Testing for specific dates.

Average Test Scores

In 2004, the average national and North Carolina test scores for the ACT were as follows:

	<u>National</u>	<u>N.C.</u>
English	20.4	19.4
Math	20.7	20.4
Reading	21.3	20.6
Scientific Reasoning	20.9	20.1
Composite Scores	20.9	20.3

For More Information

ACT
500 ACT Drive
P.O. Box 168
Iowa City, IA 52243-0168
319-337-1270
www.act.org

SAT or ACT: How Do You Know?

Check with your school counselor or the admission offices at the colleges of your choice to see which test is required or recommended.

Community College Placement Tests

The COMPASS, ASSET, and ACCUPLACER/CPT measure mathematics, reading, and writing skills. Prospective students may be required to take one of these tests prior to registering for curriculum courses at a community college. These tests are used primarily to place students in courses appropriate to their current skill levels. Unlike the other tests in this publication, the COMPASS and ACCUPLACER/CPT are electronic tests. The computer gives you questions based on your responses. For example, you will receive a more challenging question if you answer an item correctly. Likewise, you will receive a less challenging question if you answer incorrectly. The COMPASS and ACCUPLACER/CPT are not timed, although it takes most students two to three hours to complete. The ASSET is a timed test. You may not use notes or books during your test. Some colleges will not allow a calculator. Typically, you can receive your scores immediately after finishing the test.

Preparation

For ASSET and COMPASS, visit www.act.org/asset or www.act.org/compass/sample for test-taking tips and sample questions. For the ACCUPLACER, go to the website listed at the end of this section.

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.

Registration

Each community college may differ in the way it structures placement testing registration. When you visit the community college you wish to attend, be sure to ask about placement testing.

Cost and Test Dates

- Currently there is no charge to take a placement test at a community college.
- Contact your community college admissions office for test dates and times.

Average Test Scores

Community colleges have “cut-off” scores to help determine the courses in which students will be most successful. You will talk with someone after testing who will interpret your scores for you.

For More Information

Contact your community college admissions office for more information, or contact the testing centers listed below:

COMPASS and ASSET Testing

ACT
500 ACT Drive
P.O. Box 168
Iowa City, IA 52243-0168
319-337-1270
www.act.org

ACCUPLACER/CPT

The College Board
45 Columbus Avenue
New York, NY 10023
212-713-8000
<http://cpts.accuplacer.com/docs/StudentGuide.html>



Need help preparing for college tests?

CFNC.org now offers comprehensive FREE test prep courses for the SAT, ACT, and GRE. **CFNC Test Prep** features easy-to-use tutorials, interactive practice sessions that dynamically adapt to each student's ability level, and a vocabulary builder that contains 2,000 words. Whether you have a week or a year until the test, this section of the site will reinforce your academic skills and build your confidence as you approach test day.

Here is what you will find at **CFNC.org**:

SAT - Tutorials, practice sessions, and test-taking tips to help you prepare for the SAT

ACT - Tests your knowledge of four ACT subject areas: English, Reading, Math, and Science Reasoning

GRE - Tools to help you study for the Graduate Record Examination for graduate school admission

Vocab Builder - Contains over 2,000 words and adapts to your ability level.

How to Use College Test Prep at CFNC.org:

1. Click on **Test Prep**. (You must have a **My CFNC account** to access the test prep section.)
2. Select the test for which you wish to prepare.
3. Follow the on-screen instructions for each test.

The image displays three overlapping screenshots of the CFNC.org website. The top screenshot shows the main navigation menu with options like 'My CFNC', 'Career Center', 'Student Planner', 'College Fair', 'Online Applications', 'Paying for College', and 'Campus Events'. The middle screenshot shows the 'College Test Prep' section, which includes a description of the free test prep courses for SAT, ACT, and GRE, and a list of available tests. The bottom screenshot shows a sample arithmetic question: 'Question 1. Arithmetic. A table with columns A and B. Row 1: x, 125% of 80% of x. Below the table are four radio button options: (A) A is greater, (B) B is greater, (C) A and B are equal, (D) There is not enough information. A 'Submit Answer' button is at the bottom right of the question area.

www.CFNC.org • 866-866-CFNC (2362)

Se Habla Español